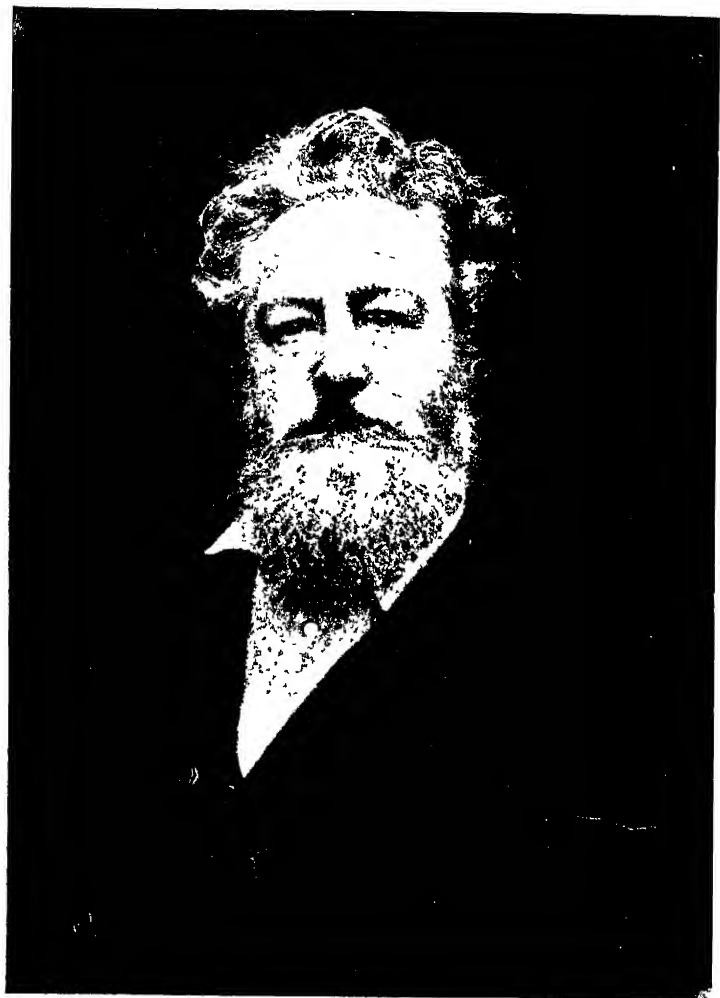


WILLIAM MORRIS



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# WILLIAM MORRIS

BY

PAUL BLOOMFIELD

AUTHOR OF "QUITE CONTRAIRE" "IMAGINARY WORLDS"  
ETC. ETC

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## FOREWORD

THIS is a book about William Morris; biographically, I claim no more. Admirers of the great wise man may find that my researches have enabled me to furnish them with one or two episodes of his career with which they may be unfamiliar, though the sources are published; and I have also been able to draw on a little unpublished material.

I have laid what I believe is a fair emphasis on Morris's view of life, at the expense of the enormous catalogue of his writings and designs, my belief being that much more than a revival of interest in his wallpapers, chintzes, printing, and fairy romances will be needed if he is to come into his own. I have it in me to say, "Hang the wallpapers!"—and should say it, if in making them he had not been illustrating his philosophy. Besides, they are charming. Still, charming and important though they are, they have distracted attention from the fact that Morris was above all a prophet; a sage.

Fifteen years ago, on a warm, dark day of the first January after the war—the War to end War—I stopped a man in an Oxford quadrangle (a man whom I only knew slightly), and asked him for goodness' sake to recommend me a wise book. He reflected a moment, then gave *News from Nowhere*, by William Morris.

I have still no Morris wallpapers in my home,

but if any one buttonholed me to-day and asked me to name a wise book, I should still think *News from Nowhere* a proper answer.

To-day, no doubt even in the gagged countries, there are many people who do not will the world's undoing, either in war or through commerce carried to its most hectic extreme. Alas! most of the kind of people whom an understanding of Morris would bind together in a fellowship of moderation and human good sense have not read him. It is the man with an instinctive hatred or fear of Morris who almost alone seems to read him—or rather, to dip into his pages just enough to be able to quote Scripture proving him an obscurantist. This is not dishonesty, it is a morbid shrinking from revelations of human personality. It is the characteristic modern prudery.

Morbid or not, one cannot easily forgive the writer who, unashamed in his swaddling of fig-leaves, contributing to one of our smooth streamline technical magazines, says (after quoting a famous passage): "That English counties would cease to be overhung with smoke because of improved industrial technique . . . simply did not occur to Morris or his innumerable disciples." "Innumerable" is good! Morris, my dear sir, as you would know if you read *him* instead of other people like yourself *about* him—Morris almost on bended knees begged science to teach us how to keep town and country clean, how to do away with smoke and dirt. He thought that

was just how science ought to be employed. (See *Hopes and Fears for Art.*)

Then these nervous perfectibilians put it about that Morris was an arch-priest of some absurd religion of Simple Life. He wanted a simpler life, which is quite a different thing. Surely I am not the only visitor to the annual exhibitions at Olympia to whom it regularly comes as a pleasant surprise that there are so many things made which one is fortunate not to possess, and blessed not to covet? Yet we are told that we ought to consume much, so as to keep wage-earners employed. And the wage-earners in their turn have to make things not *too* durable, for, if they did not wear out, employment would suffer. What a queer, complicated arrangement! Why, Morris asked, should not the production and distribution of goods be organised for every one to have a minimum, and in such a way that, with fewer things made, life could be simple enough for us to grasp it, intellectually, and be thankful for it, piously, and make a good job of it, æsthetically? But he was not a simple-lifer. Simple-lifers do not spend £10,000 on rare books, as he did.

He was an idealist. This at last is a charge that the defence cannot rebut. It is a charge; but is it an offence? Some of his poor harassed counsel have hastily pleaded guilty for him. "But I have done nothing!" he might exclaim, as he once did in Thames Police Court.

And who are we to sit in judgment on the poet-moralist? Who are we to teach him that

the aridity of our poverty-stricken hearts is more true than his warm understanding? We must not allow ourselves to think that the instances we can marshal of human triviality and baseness necessarily invalidate the reality of which his words are tokens. The poet-moralist is reasonable in his own way, which is to seek an exalted ethical consistency rather than the lowest common multiple of human frailty. The categorical imperative has his loyalty, and it shines to him more brightly than all the figures issued by the Registrar-General.

Of course we are shy of the absolute. Let us by all means be shy of it for ourselves. But who can personify Love, or any of the virtues, for more than a moment of time? We scud through our earthly existence like clouds that seem to entangle the moon in a silvery light of their own—but they do not. Love and the Virtues are still there when we are out of one or bankrupt of the others. This is the message of the poet-moralist. "There are," says Jean-Paul, "so many tender and holy emotions flying about our inward world, which, like angels, can never assume the body of an outward act; so many rich and lovely flowers spring up which bear no seed, that it is a blessing poetry was invented, which receives into its limbo all these incorporeal spirits and the perfume of all these flowers . . ."

Morris was a poet who wanted to establish his flower-garden, his Paradise, on earth, and to throw it open to all men.

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*All writers about Morris must owe much to Professor Mackail's classic "Life." I am personally indebted to Sir Sydney Cockerell who allowed me to see his Taylor-Webb letters; to Mr. G. E. Manwaring, of the London Library, for very much help; and to Mr C. M. Weekley, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, who has also been writing a book about Morris. Might all rivalry be as useful to the parties concerned as ours has been to me.*

*The Trafalgar Square picture is reproduced by kind permission of the Editor of the "Illustrated London News," and the Morris "Sunflower" pattern on the wrapper, and the picture of Merton Abbey, by kind permission of Morris & Co.*

*P B.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### I

WILLIAM MORRIS was born on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1834, at Elm House, Walthamstow. If it had been a few months earlier, he would have first seen the light of day in Lombard Street, in the lodgings over the office of his father's firm of bill-brokers. There the two elder children, both girls, had been born; and now Mr. Morris had a son, whom he could look forward to initiating into bill-broking and in due course taking into partnership.

The parents belonged to the rising middle class, whose domination in England had officially begun two years earlier with the passing of the Reform Bill. They were wealthy and conventional, and it was for the children of people like them that the Victorian Age might have been predestined by a Benthamite and Malthusian Providence. By a Providence, that is, sympathetically interested in the security of the people at the top, and regretfully recognising the Devil's claim to the hindmost.

There were six more children to come after William. Mr. Morris died in 1847. Mrs. Morris, who had been a little girl of eleven at the time of the battle of Waterloo, survived till 1894. She

was always on friendly terms with her son of genius, in spite of the readjustment of values—a painful business—that his conduct more than once obliged her to undertake. The same obligation was not acknowledged by all the brothers and sisters. They were mostly the typical and straightlaced gentry of the age. From the moment when, in his early twenties, Morris found his vocation, till the end, he had hardly any dealings with the brothers. The records have little to say about them. In 1892 we meet one of them, Eric, at Merton Abbey, with his arms plunged to the elbow in the indigo vat. He had come down in the world. From being a country squire he had descended to engaging in the confectionery business. When that had failed he had turned to William, and seems to have been quite happy earning his wages in that remarkable factory. Then also, on the stormy afternoon of 6th October 1896, the mourners at Paddington—Burne-Jones, a few other friends, some Socialist leaders, and a handful of Polish Jews—are joined by a Colonel Morris, and a “Mr. H. S. Morris and son.”

William Morris the elder was a bill-broker of Welsh descent with Quaker connections. Every weekday he took the stage-coach to the City, and on Sundays led his family in acts of worship in which nothing even remotely Popish, or imaginative, or romantic could be discerned. The whole middle class was now self-consciously on its best behaviour, the various Protestant bodies and the newly enfranchised Roman Catholics as if to

prove to the aristocracy that they were worthy of their influence and affluence, and the Jews in anticipation of their disabilities being removed.

The aristocracy, it is true, went on being patronising towards the big merchants and business men. Indeed, by merely existing they were pretty well bound to hurt middle-class feelings till, towards the end of the century, the new families had developed interests of their own, and could no longer be mocked for trying to ape their superiors.

As for the masses—Lord Melbourne was not the only good-natured magnate of the 'thirties and 'forties who deplored that humanitarians *would* meddle with trying to educate them, and having the factories inspected. The first Factory Act was passed the year before William Morris was born, but children remained plentiful at a penny a day—a day, in many cases, of goodness knows how many hours up to the possible twenty-four. Lord Melbourne, a Whig minister, had his philosophy: the middle-class citizen had his *Philosophy of Manufactures*, by Andrew Ure, and the reassuring example of Mr. Rowbotham. Mr. Rowbotham was a foreman in a mill, “a man of equal respectability with any London shop-keeper,” said Dr. Ure, to whom Mr. Rowbotham owes his fame. What had Mr. Rowbotham done? He had brought up all his children in cotton factories, three of them in that very department that was usually considered the most unhealthy of all. “Are we to suppose,” asked

Dr. Ure, "that Mr. Rowbotham and hundreds such as he are so devoid of parental affection as to wish to deform their children, and to subject them to all the miseries described by Mr. Sadler's factory committee; or are they so unobservant as not to have discovered, if such a discovery can be made, that from eleven to twelve hours in a cotton mill injures the children?"

For little William Morris, at any rate, there were to be no salubrious shifts at the mules. At his feet lay the world. He had no worse oppression to fear than the bullying that he might have to put up with if he were sent, in the normal way, to a public school. There was never a class more secure, more by right of gilt-edged stock immune from persecution and annoyance and uncertainty, than the commercial middle class that made the running in Victorian England.

It is true that if Morris had been born a little later his young manhood would have coincided more happily with the glorious heyday both of the middle-class toff and the middle-class Bohemian; the free, lavish era of the monocle and the bicycle, when wives had been emancipated from their lords and masters—though domestic servants were still the slaveys of their mistresses; when "the Halls" were so lively, and the rich Englishman in his check cap was recognised by simple people all over the Continent as almost a god, whose word was his bond. Even so, from a material point of view there was as much to be said for being Master William Morris, son of the

bill-broker of Woodford Hall (where they had moved in 1840), as for being Count Leo Tolstoy, of Yasnaya Polyana, with the blood of one hundred and twenty noble families mingling in his veins.

Tolstoy was six years older than Morris. He, too, was born to great privileges, and chose to incur other and greater responsibilities than his birth carried with it. And perhaps it is not strange that most educated people in England to-day have read Tolstoy's books, and know something about his life, while not one in a hundred of them know more about Morris than that he designed some wall-papers, wrote—they cannot remember what, and was, generally speaking, an arty-and-crafty sort of person. Tolstoy wrote superb novels; Tolstoy had adventures with gipsy girls, and married, and had twelve children, and rushed to extremes of piety; one of his realistic stories is about a young man who deceives a poor girl, and afterwards goes back and makes an honest woman of her; Tolstoy in his old age wore a shirt and wooden shoes, reaped the corn with his peasants, and then one day ran away from his family, and was found by his broken-hearted Countess dying at a railway station. For although Morris's life, held up even to this criterion, was eventful enough, two causes have worked against its being much studied and appreciated at home. He was a dangerous rebel against the faith of the British middle class, which is very different from having been, like Tolstoy, a rebel in far-away Russia;

and secondly, his most beautiful immortal books are too dreamlike, too tender and idealistic, and too *short*, to hold the imagination of those on whom may be said to rest, at present, the honour of constituting posterity.

One point in the comparison of these two great men should not escape the reader. Tolstoy in early manhood began to ask himself the question: How ought a man to live? There seems hardly ever to have been a time in Morris's life when this question was quite out of his mind, or when he was wholly unprepared with an answer. It was not the answer that after much spiritual wrestling was given by Tolstoy. It is an answer that deserves the consideration of all moderate people. For whereas Tolstoy rejected the world, Morris accepted it as something to be made the most of.

In 1840, then, the Morrises had taken the roomy Georgian Woodford Hall, on the edge of Epping Forest. The boy was very sensitive to natural beauty; the Forest threw a spell over him; all his life he loved its hornbeams and its glades, and drew for inspiration on his memory of make-believe among its ferns and round its holly thickets. And his fancy was already almost incredibly well equipped with romantic figures with which to people the woodland scenes. By the age of four he had read a good part of Walter Scott's novels. Before the family had been a year at Woodford he had got through all Scott, much of Captain Marryat, and more besides.

Neither now nor later did his love of books and of art make him think less of the pleasures of the open air. The great æsthete was from boyhood fond of riding and fishing and walking ; if he had had a mind to it, he could have distinguished himself in competitive sport. When still a child he liked shooting—he would have preferred to bring down his game with a bow and arrow—but his instinct soon weaned him from it. His close friend, Edward Burne-Jones, once said that if children were taught to draw animals they would stop wanting to kill them. Morris as a boy began to learn their names, and that did just as well.

He was precocious in patches. With all his reading he could never have emulated the little Ruskin, who at the age of nine wrote *Eudoxia, a Poem on the Universe*—if only because it was not for years that he could write at all, and then his spelling was shocking. He went on spelling badly all his life, and it was not till a year or two before he died that he could bring himself to buy a dictionary.

Mr. Morris does not seem to have had strict views about education. Till the boy was nine all the formal teaching he got was from his sisters' governesses. Then he was sent to a preparatory school kept by the Misses Arundale, and stayed with them till after his father's death, which befell shortly before he went to Marlborough. This was in 1848.

Meanwhile, during his first year at the Misses

Arundale's, something quite unexpected had happened—something that was to make assurance doubly sure that he would be able to choose a career freely when the critical moment came, without having to worry about money.

Not content with singling out Mr. Morris to be the father of an eager and precocious boy, fate went on, in 1844, to making him the hero of a very lucky adventure. He came into possession of two hundred and seventy-two pound shares in a copper mine near Tavistock, which were accepted by him, so the story goes, in payment of a debt. Soon after, those shares were worth more than two hundred thousand pounds.

Mr. Morris died in 1847, and a part of his lucky legacy duly fell to his son William who, in the years to come, applied it for the benefit of the whole community. "It pleases me," Mr. Yeats has written, "to imagine the copper mine which brought so much unforeseen wealth and in so astonishing a way, as no less miraculous than the three arrows in *The Sundering Flood*." Whether Steelhead had a finger in the business or not, the affair of the Devon Great Consols, as the company was called, takes an important place among the windfalls of history. The shares stayed at a high value long enough to enable William Morris to foster his first ventures, and did not seriously fluctuate till he was in a position, and of enough experience, to be spurred on instead of discouraged by losses.

## II

The growing boy at Woodford, ward of an enchanted forest and a magic mine, knew nothing then or for years to come of the conditions from which his age of sylvan happiness took the name "the Hungry 'Forties." At the time when, in his toy suit of armour, he was living over again the exploits of Ivanhoe, children younger than he were in grim earnest reproducing the wretched episodes of Oliver Twist. History gives us "piteous glimpses of shoeless, ragged, and hungry children, not daring to ask their mothers for another helping." Another helping of what? Of a mess of potatoes, perhaps, flavoured with a little fat. Just now the father's wages were eight to ten shillings a week if he was a farm labourer, and less than a pound if a carpenter, mason, or plumber, while a four-pound loaf cost eleven-pence halfpenny and a pound of tea not less than five shillings. Dr. Ure tried to make out a case for such wages too. Was it not a fact, as he pointed out, that male prisoners in Manchester, at the New Bailey Prison, were adequately nourished for 1s. 6 $\frac{2}{4}$ d. per week per head, and females for 1s. 1 $\frac{5}{8}$ d. ? Dr. Ure's advocacy may be said to have failed. Wages were bad ; conditions in the factories were brutal. In the mines women and children hauled, for thirteen hours a day, at trucks to which they were chained like beasts, until the Act of 1842 forbade the employment underground of women, and of boys *under ten*.

Half-starved or merely underfed as to the body, most of these poor little creatures were left entirely without nourishment for mind and spirit. Even when there were schools for them to be sent to, the few pence they could earn were too important to their parents for them to be released from mine and mill and workshop, and they did not have to wait till they were ten for leave to serve in the last two. For them there was not much Walter Scott or Captain Marryat. By the time they had learnt to read there was hardly any leisure left them, for the rest of their lives, in which to read anything. Disrupted family life, no leisure, no handing down from father to son of traditional crafts: it was in these decades that taste was stamped out among the English masses. Their sense of beauty withered from disuse.

The sense of beauty among simple people is not expressed very much in talk and discussion. It operates instinctively, showing itself in the work of their hands. Now, in the boyhood of William Morris, the hands of English men and women were pulling levers, and turning wheels, and screwing and riveting, and the instinct from which the sense of beauty is derived, the instinct of æsthetic self-expression, which comes naturally to all except the most primitive savages, and is the first decisive movement towards a truly human culture—languished and failed.

It was going to be easier to give them back their lost physical rights than taste and imagination.

The new bad taste permeated from the bottom of society upwards, and from there down again. Not only iron bedsteads and tin trays, everything could be got cheap and nasty. Gothic was reviving: that meant one could buy Gothic ornament wholesale to plaster on the mean Gothic churches that were being run up, most of which soon fortunately collapsed. The House of Commons had been getting quite worried. In 1835 a Commission was appointed to look into the deplorable state of art in application to industry. The result was the opening, two years later, of a Government School of Design at Somerset House, a pitiful attempt to compel art in a strait-jacket to minister to the whimsical needs of the factories. A little later again, and the national decadence in art was complete. When the renaissance came, Morris was the practical leader of the movement.

The world seldom lacks ingenuity to invent new miseries and oppressions at least equivalent to the old ones that have been extirpated. But this and other cautious reflections on the difficulties attending any theory of Progress should not make any one who is not indifferent to human suffering the less grateful to the English idealists of the middle nineteenth century. These men fought the hydra-headed social evil, exploitation, and upheld the honour of their country.

There are still a few people to-day who feel that a man's worth can be measured by his success in competition—not of course only his

worth as a competitor, but his total worth. A rough justice, they presume, brings the virtuous to the top: the virtuous, the industrious, the gifted. If you are in the workhouse, it is probably your deserts. This virile argument, which implicitly denies the hypothesis of mute inglorious Miltons, is now only put forward by a respectable minority, but in the days when Dickens was writing as one who knew certain things from experience, and Disraeli wrote *Sybil* as one who could make deductions from the evidence of his senses, the great Juggernaut of the public opinion that counted was on that side—and ready to crush the opposition.

Kingsley needed courage to declare himself a Chartist. The perseverance and humanity of those first four amazing Factory Inspectors was beyond praise; they had the Goliaths of industry against them, and not much encouragement from the law they represented. Their names were Baker, Horner, Howell, and Kincaid. Another great name is that of Frederick Denison Maurice, who, just after William Morris left Marlborough, was founding the Working Men's College.

Among the assistants of Maurice at the College in Crowndale Road was John Ruskin. Ruskin's function was to look after the teaching of art, and in this he was helped, and sometimes, as he felt, hindered, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Ruskin believed in the particular need for exercises in light and shade. Rossetti was a very clever

and irrepressible colourist. His pupils loved the way he smudged dry colours over a piece of paper, and then suddenly ran them together, and there was your picture, all finished. Rossetti would observe: "Mr. Ruskin 'll spoil their eye for colour if he keeps 'em so long at that pencil and sepia drawing," and Ruskin said to a member of the class: "Yes, Mr. Rossetti is such a colourist that he wants everybody to be the same, and would have people practise colour before they understand light and shade, and how colour is affected by it." The situation was curiously typical: Ruskin, grand and conscientious and a little querulous; Rossetti, positive and fascinating.

These two men were united in their passion for art. Each was a genius, and each had a part to play in the life of William Morris. In due course Ruskin became the great prophet of the idea that art, religion, and life are one. Rossetti's outlook was in some respects more sophisticated than Ruskin's, and art meant to him painting, and perhaps poetry—certainly not ethics, and morals, and religion, and politics. Morris came to know Ruskin well, but never saw much of him; Rossetti he met in 1855, and for good and ill their close relationship lasted twenty years.

At the Working Men's College Ruskin was getting an opportunity of putting his theories into practice. He had seen very well that the industrial revolution had taken away from most workmen in England something precious besides

freedom, namely, the sense of there being such a thing as the Good Life. He had noticed that as the flood of ugliness rose, the middle class, though free and materially prosperous, had also lost any sense of values that he could respect. Their standards of life were going up, their standards of good and evil were going wrong. At the Working Men's College he tried to teach his pupils, besides light and shade, that some things are good in themselves ; and when a man came to him one day with a practical end in view and asked for instruction in designing cart-wheels, he emphatically demurred.

### III

The neglect of the new England to ask itself any longer what life was for, what all the tussle and turmoil and grinding of wheels was expected to lead to, beyond an increase of material possessions, both for those who had too few and those who already had enough of them, had been commented on ten years earlier by a writer in the *Quarterly Review*. This article did not attract much attention at the time. It was Dr. Richard Garnett who afterwards pointed out how it had anticipated some of Ruskin's theories, and some of the principles of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, of Burne-Jones, and of William Morris.

The style was rather solemn, but none the less vigorous for that. The writer began by

comparing the hopeless methods of the Government Schools of Design with the way art had been fostered in Medicean Florence. It was a case of the cart before the horse. Always, he said, "the fine arts . . . have . . . followed the lead of society, rather than acted as a prompting cause." People have got to want art, not to have it thrust upon them. Florentine art, he said, was eminently practical: the painter started on his career in the craftsman's *bottega*, and his work was always largely decorative and constructive, an intrinsic element in churches and in the home.

Then, though he was writing as early as 1840—and how long ago it seems—he cried with the voice of prophecy: "It is our civilisation that has degraded the artisan by making the man not a machine, but something even inferior, the part of one: and above all, by the division of labour. He who passes his life in making pins' heads will never have a head for anything else." The danger that machinery, while seeming to add so much to the human store of good things, may really be limiting human personality, he fully understood. "While we triumph," he goes on, "in 'the results of machinery,' we must not repine if one of those results be the paralysis of the imaginative faculties of the human mind."

The *Quarterly Review* did not print the signatures of its contributors, but there is no mystery as to who wrote this article, called "The Fine Arts in Florence." It was the son of Meyer

Cohen of the Stock Exchange, the learned Jewish convert to the Church of England, who is known as Sir Francis Palgrave. He had taken his Gentile wife's mother's surname, and was the father of Francis Turner Palgrave of the *Golden Treasury*.

Antiquarian and lover of art, Sir Francis was also strongly religious. He had been carried away by the High Church movement, which was concentrating in itself much of the idealism of the day. In his article he went on to deplore "the destruction of the mediæval religious feeling by the bigotry of modern classical taste." How could one expect anything worthy in art that was enthralled by the "sensuality" of the Greeks? "By the absence of religious feeling," he declared, "art has lost its truest support." And he ended by quoting with a degree of approval some sentiments of Mr. Henry Drummond, adding in a friendly way that he could hardly be expected to admit that one could not produce good art without being a good Roman Catholic. All the same, he doubted whether one could produce good art without being good High Church.

To such problems and postulates, to the idealism of Palgrave and Ruskin, to the sympathies of Maurice and Kingsley, to the pen of Dickens the reformer, to the tubs of the Chartist ringleaders—as well as to an income from his copper mine, William Morris in due course succeeded. In his works and in his life he offered

an answer to the two cardinal questions : How shall a man get enough to eat ? and How ought a man to live ?

All this was far from fulfilling the ambitions his parents had entertained for him. William probably had nothing against the City till he decided, at Marlborough, that his destiny was the Church. Later it amused him to imagine what would have happened if, under pressure, he had taken on the bill-broking. He said : " I should have broken the bills into very small bits."

## CHAPTER TWO

### I

WHEN Morris went to Marlborough in January 1848, he had never for more than a few days at a time been at any considerable distance from home. The Misses Arundale's school was at Walthamstow. He had been a boarder there for a while, but the house was only a stone's-throw from Woodford.

With his father mostly away at his business in London, Morris was for the first fourteen years of his life in the company and under the control of women. An affectionate mother, games with elder sisters but only younger brothers, lessons from governesses and schooling from dames—such feminine influences might have been very bad for the manhood of this little Victorian. Many a boy brought up like this would have arrived at Marlborough rather mollycoddled and not able to look after himself.

It was not the case of William Morris ; and lucky for him. He was a thick-set, strong boy, with red cheeks and curly black hair. They soon found out at Marlborough that he had a genial nature—but also a quick and violent temper. It stood him in good stead.

For the Marlborough of his day was rough.

Not perhaps rougher than most of the other schools : at the early Victorian Eton, according to a devoted historian, "the smaller boys were subjected to a regular course of bullying, and fagging in college would perhaps have caused surprise even to a slave-driver in a West Indian plantation." Harrow was no better than it had been twenty years earlier, when Henry Acland in that "sad realm" strove "to mourn," and mourned in vain, over the blackguardism of his schoolfellows.

Morris entered Marlborough at a critical moment. In the course of 1848 the number of boys going there was doubled. It was an odd policy for the authorities to adopt when they had been able to make only inadequate provision for two hundred and fifty. These had had a single schoolroom between them; the five hundred had two. In each schoolroom were no more than two fires, and most of the boys seldom got near them. Sometimes they got nearer than was needed to keep them warm; that was when they "were submitted to the ordeal of 'roasting,' a familiar form of torture in those days." By no means the only one. There was also "the suspending of small boys in sheets over the banisters of the upper corridors of A. house," and "boring the ears of small boys with pins, and even with pocket-knives, was another form of pastime."

The quotations are from the official history of Marlborough, by Messrs. A. G. Bradley, A. C.

Champneys, J. W. Baines, J. R. Taylor, H. C. Brentnall, and J. G. Turner, and these six gentlemen have not thought it worth while to mention either in their narrative or in the index the name of William Morris. According to Mr. Osbert Burdett it was still possible, fifty years after Morris was there, to be educated at Marlborough without learning of his existence.

Morris was not one of the Marlborough bullies, nor one of their victims. He seems to have been put down as "slightly mad" and left to his own devices. And so, as cricket and football were not compulsory, and of all people in the world he was—even as a boy—full of devices, things might have been a good deal more disagreeable. It has been plausibly suggested that he would have suffered more in the humanised public school of to-day with its greater discipline and regular games.

Certainly, though cricket and football were there for him to play, Morris did not play them. In this he was not one of the minority. The great heroic thing to be at school in the 'forties was not Captain of Cricket but the toughest of the bruisers. Whether most of the boys who could not possibly hope to achieve this distinction were content to pass the afternoon counting the black eyes and bloody noses of more promising aspirants, or whether they merely held out idle hands to the Devil, confident of some occasion for minor mischief, is not a question about which conjecture is likely to be very rewarding. But

it does perhaps make the brutalities of those days in factory and mine seem slightly less—*indecent*, when one contemplates the savageries the growing men of the nearly “highest” class perpetrated on one another.

Morris cared for none of those things. He spent his leisure rambling in Savernake Forest and watching the squirrels, or exploring the country and its Celtic barrows and other ancient remains, or reading about art and archæology in the College library. He collected birds’ eggs; he made up stories about knights and fairies.

He had another way of spending the time indoors besides reading and telling stories. His pursuits, that have already been mentioned, pointed clearly enough at what were going to be absorbing interests of his later life; this peculiar one was not only a sign, but a symbol. “The restlessness of his fingers . . . was even then very noticeable. He used to seek relief from it in endless netting. With one end of the net fastened to a desk in the big schoolroom he would work at it for hours together . . .” In the comprehensive hall, which served the bullies for inflicting torture and the masters for tormenting the bullies in their turn with a little Latin and Greek, William Morris began to spin the web of his fate. One can imagine him in the middle of the riot and hullabaloo—two hundred and fifty boys playing, quarrelling, roasting and being roasted—and he intent, his firm jaw set, his small eyes flashing as he first obeyed his instinct to

create something with his hands. Interfere with him who dared ! Instinctive it was. The spirit moved him. It would be difficult to explain, if at this stage he had had any conscious desire of becoming a craftsman. Even in his last term, after he had been to the Great Exhibition, he was more interested in theology than anything else. He was still normal enough to take for granted without having to think about it that it could never be respectable for a gentleman to go in for art or craftsmanship. Gentlemen became clergymen, or soldiers, or sailors, or went to the bar, or to the City, or sat in Parliament. (But one almost had to be of noble blood to think of a seat in the Commons ) Anyhow, obviously gentlemen never worked for their living with their hands.

Out of Morris's sense of beauty there had grown a pious sense of the past. This took nothing away from, it added to, the parent love of nature ; and duly, by another expansion of his character, the piety became differentiated from the romantic feeling for the old days of chivalry, and developed into the intention of taking Holy Orders. He would be a High Church priest, like his favourite sister Emma's husband, the Reverend Joseph Oldham.

## II

Early Victorian idealism was so largely theological, because only a few alert minds had

realised so far on what plane the new materialistic forces would have to be combated. There was also sound sense in the notion that if people were getting less regular about going to church it might be due to the laxity of their pastors. Services conducted without fervour were boring. When one came to look into it, the services were also not quite *right*. Something had got to be done to put more religion into them again. This, according to the Anglo-Catholics, would present no difficulties if the Church would remember the days of Archbishop Laud, when the worship due to God was paid Him correctly, with the full ceremonial prescribed either divinely in the Scriptures, or by the best inspired authorities.

The impulse to reform the Church was sincerely inward and spiritual, the course that reform took was in great measure outward and visible. The placing of so much emphasis on the æsthetic expression of a deep feeling was quite in keeping with the Classical traditions of life and art. But the style and idiom of Anglo-Catholicism were inevitably Gothic. The Gothic age had turned its face from Greek "sensuality" and rationalism. The Caroline ritual had been the outcome of mediæval, that is Gothic, devotion. The architecture of the Gothic cathedral was, in its various parts, and in the relations between them, a true analogy of religion. Thus the son and biographer of the architect, George Edmund Street, to whom Morris was afterwards apprenticed for a short time, explains that "Symbolism

gave us first the church shaped in the form of a Cross to impress on us the Doctrine of the Atonement. . . . The choir, which tends northward, typifies the inclination of our Lord's head on the Cross, and has a certain architectural value." And the elevation of the chancel and arrangement of the stalls "came undeniably from a belief in the doctrine of a real Presence in the Sacrament."

All this symbolism would not do in terms of the Classical, because the Greek and Italian solicitude for proportion was condemned as affected and anti-natural, therefore irreligious, while Gothic, being natural and humble, was virtuous, and so the only tolerable style. In short, the High Church Movement and the Gothic Revival went *pari passu*, and found each other mutually stimulating.

Marlborough College in the late 'forties, when Morris went there, had acquired a "distinctly High Church character." A choir had been formed and was trained to sing old music, which it gave Morris delight to listen to. All his life he found beauty persuasive; small wonder that in boyhood, before he had learnt to draw certain fairly obvious distinctions, he should have been the more ready to adopt, because of its external charms, a doctrine which had already attracted him by its inward earnestness. He wrote to Emma about an Easter anthem that "a gentleman (one of the boy's fathers) said on the whole our choir sang better than Salisbury Cathedral;

anyhow, I thought it very beautiful . . ."—and he describes the effect on him in a long sentence without as much as a comma in it, which is nevertheless as full of life as a paragraph out of Proust. In the same letter there are accounts of expeditions to look at ancient remains, and he speaks of a Norman church, and with a sort of naïve preciseness mentions the "tessellated" pavement. The last part of the letter would reassure any one who—unacquainted with Morris's character later on—might be disappointed to think there had never been something of the normal schoolboyish triviality about him. He says: "As you are going to send me the cheese perhaps you would let Sarah to make me a good large cake . . ." and "will you also send me some paper and postage stamps also my silkworms eggs . . ."

Morris was unmistakably a normal kind of boy in many ways; indeed, in some of his schoolboyishness he persisted all his life. His fingers were always to be inky, or covered with paint, or glue, or dye. He never lost his power of being enthusiastic, even when he had grown grey, and grave, and had suffered deep disappointments. The high spirits that are just a symptom of youth in most people, in Morris's case were still getting on the nerves of his more staid acquaintances as late as the 'seventies, and later.

That there was permanently something of a child about him his friends were agreed. He had, like other great men, an unusual assortment

of qualities. But he could have combined his æsthetic bent with a perfectly masculine temperament and innumerable practical interests without being the singular and wise genius that he was. Before the second half of the nineteenth century Englishmen were not surprised when one of them showed signs of loving books and pictures as well as, say, angling and horse-racing. The narrowing of interests—the division of leisure, as one might put it, followed the division of labour. But even with culture falling into disrepute, and time coming more and more to mean money, the circle of people who respected the ideal of an all-round personality, though it shrank to a modest diameter, never quite reached a vanishing-point.

Morris did not have to be a prig, boy or man, to fulfil his high errand. Untidy, even rather dirty, enthusiastic, enterprising, hot-tempered—no, he was never insufferable, however much he preferred to study Druidical rings and tessellated pavements while other Marlburians boxed.

Though there was nothing startlingly “unnatural” or unboyish in Morris’s conversion to Anglo-Catholicism while he was at Marlborough, yet this seems to have been the event least compatible with his own nature that happened in his young days, or even in all his life. But it would have been difficult for him to behave otherwise than he did. He was in the position of an earnest young voter who, having no choice but to vote for A or B, and preferring A, works

himself up to believing that A is all white and B very black. The reason why the schoolboy Morris seems miscast in the rôle of High Churchman is that he soon proved he was essentially not a believer in creeds with at all a complex dogmatic structure. He was too independent, too thirsty for first-hand experience, to keep his patience for long with the ordained subtleties of theology. Companionable he was, but lacking in both the retrospective solidarity and talent for caste loyalty which a man has to have if he is to believe truth inseparably bound up with a number of time-honoured religious observances.

This talent is, as it were, the most sophisticated manifestation of parochialism. Morris was never parochial. He had—and in this he was like Ruskin, like all men of genius, whose genius is to understand, and interpret and create, like all the great prophets and many of the great poets—an innocent and original mind. The world was born again on his birthday. His career was a new blossoming of human goodwill. He responded to the tribulations of his kind with an innocent heart. He saw with an undeluded, innocent eye.

### III

So it came about that in 1851, during the last term at Marlborough, a very significant fact was revealed to him.

On 1st May the Great Exhibition was opened in Hyde Park. There had been tremendous

opposition to its being held, nearly all based on more or less fantastic arguments. Resistance to the project in Parliament and in the Press had been inspired by fear of Jehovah, jealousy of Prince Albert, anxiety as to the probable effects of sparrows' droppings on the roof of the Crystal Palace. All obstacles were now overcome, and Queen Victoria could write to King Leopold: "The *greatest* day in our history, the *most beautiful* and *imposing* and *touching* spectacle ever seen, and the triumph of my beloved Albert." The three-quarters of a million people who turned out to line the route between Buckingham Palace and Hyde Park were so uplifted by their sense of the occasion marking an epoch, that it is said the day passed off without the police having to arrest a single brawler or pickpocket.

The Exhibition did mark an epoch. Exhibitions had been organised in France at regular intervals of five years since 1834, and at the one in 1849 "the skilled workman, in his turn, for the first time received the reward due to his active co-operation and industrious improvements." Larousse, however, goes on to admit that it is from the Great Exhibition of 1851 "that one may reckon the age of the machines, already greater and more fruitful of magnificent results than many centuries past."

The Exhibition was indeed, as the Queen said, the "triumph" of Prince Albert. The royal consort was an idealist whose nature was to look for social salvation not in any adjustment of

ritual to theological tradition, but in industry—industry in three senses: hard work, organised work, and mechanised work. He believed that the nations of the world, united in their astonished admiration of all that Progress had yielded them for their pains, would learn to live in harmony, eschewing war in order the more rapidly to multiply zebra-wood beds, and carp-like submarine-boats, and symbolic papier-mâché chairs, and microscopes, and musical-boxes. and everything else that kindly science could find means for producing. The dreams of Francis Bacon were on the point of being realised. Prince Albert's optimism had conquered the critics. The *Art Journal* exclaimed with a rhetoric that was no more than typical: "What a proof of the great peace-progress of England! What evidence of veritable strength and conscious rectitude—England for, not against, the world! . . . What opportunities for improvement!"

It shows the extraordinary dreamy rapture of mind in which practical men and economists can live, that responsible Englishmen in 1851 fancied the nations were indefinitely going to let England put herself to the trouble of being the world's workshop. They laid their plans accordingly. Yet they must have known a little geography and history. They could hardly have ignored that other countries had raw materials, and in many cases were populated by people not without energy and ambition. Already at this very Exhibition the foreigners were showing a

large variety of machine-manufactured goods. There was, for instance, in the Zollverein—that is, German—section “an exquisitely finished six-pounder gun, mounted on its carriage,” which “deservedly” attracted a good deal of attention. It could not have been more brightly efficient if it had been made at Birmingham.

Among the crowds of people of all nationalities whose entrance fees turned the Great Exhibition into a success was a family party of Morrisises. William was now seventeen, and he still had a term of Marlborough to go. He must long before this have heard all about what a marvellous step forward in the march of Progress this Exhibition represented, and what clever, useful, and “exquisite” objects he would find ranged along the eleven miles of stalls. Now he was going to see for himself. He was approaching the Crystal Palace with the flags of the world fluttering from its inverted icicles. It had not then the two towers which flank it at Sydenham, so that it looked still more like a big conservatory. And now William Morris was through the turnstile. . . .

It appears that a glance was enough for him. The innocent eye penetrated in a flash through those vapours of suggestion that had acted so mesmerically on the public. All this dumped machinery, all these writhing metals and tortured textiles, and disgusting, clever wax-works of Indian Thugs (much admired by poor little Prince Bertie), and statues of plump, cow-

like kitchen-maids pretending to be Greek goddesses—wonderful indeed !

“Wonderfully ugly !” William Morris called it, and refused to go another yard.\*

There was a seat. He sat down on it. Possibly he contemplated with melancholy sympathy the poor elm tree that had been overtaken and imprisoned by Paxton. There he stayed ; the others went on.

The English are a practical people. If a man has any criticism to make of an existing arrangement they ask at once : What would he put in its place if he could have his way ? The intellectual force of even the shrewdest dissent does not impress them if it is not followed by creative proposals. “Wonderfully ugly !” said Morris of Prince Albert’s Crystal Palace. In 1862 there was another Great Exhibition, this time at Kensington Gore, on land bought for such purposes out of the £160,000 profits of 1851. One of the exhibiting firms was Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., and they were awarded two gold medals.

The Great Exhibition marked an epoch for more reasons than one. Hereafter the public sense of the Eternal dwindled more quickly than in the earlier decades, for now it was clear beyond doubt that the highest authorities—the Royal Family, the Archbishop of Canterbury, *The Times*—were on the side of material Progress, and had given it their blessing. All that was

\* F S. Ellis, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. xlv. p. 618.

most vocal in contemporary altruism seemed suddenly to have thrown in its lot with the machines. Questions of theology and ritual faded into the background. After this date fewer and fewer people thought of life as consisting of themselves and a more or less permanent landscape in which they are set, a landscape with ups and downs charted by the wise men of a hundred generations, a place better or worse to live in according to where one staked a moral claim. From now on life was more generally likened to a railway train full of passengers—first, second, and third class. The train was steaming forward to a destination that was sure to be delightful. But it really did not matter much about the destination—and it was not as if the view out of the windows mattered very much either. The great thing was to provide for there being always enough fuel to keep the engine puffing along—the faster the better : more was the pity if this engine burnt, besides coal, the leisure and life and limb and happiness of the third-class passengers.

But though industry and commerce found they had the most respectable allies, some of the forces of idealism were only loosely associated with them, and even now the enemy had not been reduced to consisting only of the undocile elements in the working classes.

The free-lance humanitarians, while not altogether opposed to the march of Progress, wanted at least to make sure that the Cavalcade was not

going to stamp out all spiritual independence. They were for the most part men and women of a less formal type of conscience than the Anglo-Catholics, whose movement was not of course—and is not—dead: once again in the lifetime of William Morris it was going to excite public attention, namely, in 1874, when the revival of the use of vestments led to an Act of Parliament which provided for legal proceedings against clergymen who employed unwonted ritual.

The social reformers were people with some money, who did not feel it was their duty to make still more money in competition with their fellows. They did accept the *fait accompli* of “modern civilisation”—but not of the evils it had brought in its train. And against these they patiently fought their fight, taking the bad conditions in detail, each according to his or her opportunities.

It was quite different with Ruskin.

#### IV

Ruskin was opposed to the whole philosophy of life implicit in the enthusiasms of 1851. He saw no analogy between any good sort of life and a railway train. To him, speed and the manufacture and use of quantities of ugly things were wicked. In any case, he hated railway trains. “The railroad,” he said, “transmutes a man from a traveller into a living parcel. For the time he has parted with the nobler characteristics of his humanity for the sake of a planetary

power of locomotion." This is a little peevish, and might have come from any conservative who hated change as such. But though he certainly felt some of this resentment against trains because they were not carriages drawn by horses—like the leisurely landau in which he had travelled with his parents every summer for many years—Ruskin had, as well, a deep insight into the vanity of accelerated transport. "The valley," he exclaimed, "is gone, and the gods with it ; and now every fool in Buxton can be at Bakewell in half an hour, and every fool in Bakewell in Buxton ; which you think is lucrative process of exchange, you Fools, everywhere !" This was very rude. Ruskin's excuse must be that he was justified.

His outburst this time was more than peevish ; it was prophetic. The prophet was not an idle, and atrabilious, "dreamer of an empty day," he was an energetic teacher, artist, and critic who believed in work. He knew that Man lives by the sweat of his brow. With this the hard-headed employers of his era, whatever their anticipations of the labour-saving to be effected by machines and railways, could scarcely have disagreed. Work was the bigger part of peoples' lives ; it could be, said Ruskin, it must be good. He was convinced it had been good at certain epochs in the past, so it was not as if the world lacked an example. What was good work like ? It was work done under decent, human conditions, providing, among other things, freedom

for the workman to develop his taste and express his individuality. To Ruskin the paragon age was the later Gothic, the age before classicism had deprived the underling of a fair share in the imaginative determination of his task. Odd though it may appear to us, Ruskin believed that between the ordered axioms of the Renaissance and the regimentation of work after the Industrial Revolution there was little to choose. Both systems, according to him, made slaves of the many.

He misread history, we know. His Gothic craftsman was "probably a man not unlike his successors, who over-estimated his own skill, grumbled at his wages, and took things, on the whole, as they came. . . ." Ruskin misread history: but does that mean he was an impractical idealist? Who is the more impractical—the bungler who bungles with the orthodox, and crashes in obedience to the rules, or the man who foresees the day of reckoning?

Often, of course, it is not the bunglers who *do* crash, but only their victims, they themselves suffering no more than a little almost painless retribution, a slight inflammation of the pride. Nor are days of reckoning always announced by the blast of a heavenly trump, or the roll of earthly drums. Doom sometimes steals on the world like a fog, in patches and imperceptibly, and side by side lives are lost in the darkness of desolation while others spin out comfortably in the light.

Railways, most people were ready to believe, were going to integrate the world. Ruskin feared they would disintegrate humanity, and that Speed would only speed up the evil effects of the Division of Labour. Would he have owned himself in the wrong if he had lived to observe the quick triumph of the submarine and the torpedo, the aeroplane and the wireless?

All this is no argument for misreading history. The famous chapter six, volume two, of *The Stones of Venice*—"On the Nature of Gothic"—does not depend for its force on the reader accepting its inaccuracies.

The book was published in 1853, and came into the hands of William Morris the same year.

## CHAPTER THREE

### I

To the Marlborough boys of Morris's time the year 1851 probably seemed more memorable for the great rebellion at school than for the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. During the Christmas term there was a violent outbreak against authority, and Mr. Wilkinson, the Anglo-Catholic headmaster, stood a siege in his lodgings. After this Mrs. Morris removed her son, whose formal studies were not getting on very well, quick though he was to pick up archæology and other things he really cared for.

In 1852 he worked at Walthamstow with a tutor, the Reverend F. B. Guy, and turned his thoughts to the classics. By the month of June he was ready to matriculate into Oxford. His college was to be Exeter. Next to him in Exeter Hall when he sat for his examination was Edward Burne-Jones. The two youths did not exchange a word, only Burne-Jones noticed the other's name when he wrote it on his Horace paper: "William Morris: his Horace." He had been much impressed by his neighbour's looks.

The bluff and red-cheeked schoolboy had by 1853 become a beautiful young man. His beauty was in keeping with his nature. He was dark

and strong, but obviously very sensitive. His short upper lip seemed to one of the new friends he made, Dixon, to express his natural chivalry. It is clear he would have been unusually handsome if his legs had not been slightly short for the rest of his powerful body.

Morris and Burne-Jones had come into residence at the end of January 1853, Burne-Jones evidently the more exultantly assured that Oxford was a city of dreams come true. The only child of a Birmingham craftsman, educated in that city, he entered the most lovely scene in England from an environment that was much less ample and dignified, and less lovely, than the Morris home near the enchanted forest. He was dashed to find the spirit unworthy of the outward shape. In the blue quadrangles, and behind the traceried windows, and before the altars of the solemn chapels he observed the *dons*—and they were unsympathetic, and in no way beacons of light. They had met ardent freshmen before. They neither burned nor wished to be set on fire. The embers of the Oxford Movement were cold; the agitation was over, and the *dons* were glad to depart in peace. In his disappointment Burne-Jones “turned around, seeking his way in unlooked-for loneliness of spirit, and there, shoulder to shoulder, stood his life’s companion.”

He had not got long to wait. They had recognised one another within a fortnight. The “life’s companion” being who he was, and knowing what one knows of all that came of

their friendship, it is happily unnecessary to feel very sorry for Burne-Jones in his plight. In addition to Morris at Exeter, he had a number of friends at Pembroke who understood, even though they did not quite sympathise with, his religious emotions and aspirations.

Morris for his part was lucky to have fallen in with this group, as he had no special Marlborough friends, and outside the Birmingham group and the freshmen who joined it from time to time he did not find much congenial society while he was at Oxford. It is true that with his resourcefulness it would not have been as hard for him to go through Oxford misunderstood as for Burne-Jones. But to the group he owed very much happiness then and ever after, and it was they who first discovered, and by their love and admiration fostered, his genius.

Burne-Jones was a remarkable youth, and in many ways the complement of his friend. Pale and delicate where Morris was sanguine and robust, calm where Morris was passionate, he had a playful sense of humour which contrasted with Morris's serious temper, and a wonderful patience which Morris had not yet. Not perhaps more civilised, Burne-Jones was certainly more urbanised than Morris, and liked looking at people more than at flowers and trees. He had a touch of sophistication that came out in the form of little jokes and parodies ; and because of this, and no doubt his lesser robustness as well, rather waited to follow till Morris led.

Morris's second great Birmingham friend was Charles Faulkner of Pembroke, who in later life followed him where even Burne-Jones would not. He was a mathematician. Burne-Jones had a charm that grew on people; Faulkner was handsome and tall, and had regular features and a frank expression. All these young men must be thought of as having rather long hair brushed down over their ears—the coiffure of the young women of seventy-five years later.

The others in the group were Fulford, Dixon, Price, and Macdonald, and the seven of them grew into a very enthusiastic mutual-admiration society. There was nothing extraordinary, and certainly nothing improper, in that. To offer a worthy *mise en scène* for such episodes of intimate hero-worship is one of the most important functions of Oxford and of Cambridge, and even when the kind of ideals the Brotherhood cherished are out of fashion there is never a generation without its coteries and clubs of the elect, each dazzled by the sheer genius of one or all of the rest.

It does not matter very much if some of this esteem is exaggerated, the important thing being for young men of promise to find out a good deal about human beings, and to value them in detail, before they get their opportunity in the world outside—as bishops, company directors, governors, magistrates, film-producers, politicians—of dealing with them wholesale. And sometimes the esteem is deserved; sometimes the clique or

brotherhood is immortal, and its heroes are celebrated down the ages.

Oxford, still to-day a sanctuary outside and above the world, was in 1853 even more blessedly remote from the turmoils of modernity. No motor cars or bicycles then endangered life in the High Street, or in the winding mediæval lanes of the ancient city. The colleges rose before the approaching visitor on every side like the most lovely of mirages sheer from the meadows, as only Merton and Corpus Christi do now. Here, whatever the shortcomings of the dons, there was beauty and peace.

Topsy Morris and Ted Jones had hoped to be met at the gates of Oxford by holy, but still mortal men, who would lose no time in instructing them how to find the City of God. It was the inverse that happened. Instead, the souls of the departed bade them welcome, offering them all the beauty that loving academical care during hundreds of years had bestowed on this thriving, earthly, provincial town. The legend runs that the old Masters and Deans of the past, as well as those graduates who have paid the simple uniform due that qualifies all men for enrolment among the shades, forgather every year in spring in the guise of leaves on the huge chestnut tree that overhangs the end of Brasenose Lane. A multitude of learned spirits must then have watched with approval from these boughs, only a little less ramified than now, how William Morris often strolled over the cobbles to the Bodleian, to read

books about art and history, and to pore over his favourite Apocalypse, which it needed no holy man to recommend to him and no tutor to elucidate.

The actual tutor's actual verdict was: "No special literary tastes or capacity." It is very odd that the tastes were not guessed. Two years passed before even the admiring Brotherhood realised the capacity—that their Topsy was a creative poet.

They admired him, in a general way, for his personality. Dixon, who afterwards really did go into the Church, noticed how very chivalrous and innocent he was. Faulkner, who studied facts, was astonished by the number of facts about the most diverse subjects that Morris knew. With the wisdom of disinterested youth they began by respecting him as already an end in himself—for what he was: they did not require achievements and success—they took it vaguely for granted, no doubt, that these would follow. Not that any of them looked forward to worldly success. They were unworldly. It even came as quite a shock to Burne-Jones, when he went to stay at Walthamstow for the first time, that the Morrises were rich and rather grand people. He had not thought of Topsy's economic aspect.

He had not thought of Topsy as a little boy who had done funny things: Mrs. Morris, no more aware that her son was in Ted's eyes a spiritual luminary than that she had given birth to a man of genius, proposed to tell Ted all kinds of charming, embarrassing stories about Topsy's

infancy—but they stopped her in time, or, as a biographer would have it, too soon.

## II

The friends did not yet call themselves a "Brotherhood." The word at first referred to a religious Brotherhood that Burne-Jones meant to found. He wrote to Cormell Price, who was still at Birmingham: "Learn Sir Galahad by heart. He is to be the patron of our Order. I have enlisted *one* in the project up here, heart and soul. You shall have a copy of the canons some day. Signed: General of the Order of Sir Galahad."

The *one* was Morris. The other friends were not Anglo-Catholics, and already were thinking more about social reform and less about salvation.

It was quite in keeping with the natural development of Morris's wisdom that he should in those days have been so much preoccupied with the things of the spirit. For the time was fast drawing on when young men were going to find it not at all clear how things of the spirit are to be distinguished from the things of the world. Morris became an atheist, but having found out what the difference was, never ceased trying to declare it.

The Topsy of Oxford days was more disgusted by than sorry for the world, and sought in books and in his heart images of ideal men. Was this not logic?—the horse before the cart? When

your man is clean, and well-fed, and noble, and splendid, how does he behave? How does he face his enemies? How does he pray—and love?

Morris did not yet ask: How does he earn his living? because he had not had a chance of finding out what part hunger and insecurity play in the shaping of morals. Later he understood very well: meanwhile his ignorance was an advantage, because it kept him free to contemplate the absolute side of human character. For men can be good or bad whether they are of independent means, or wage-earners, or slaves; their character both stands related to their particular society and to a more abstract scheme of things—or, as Topsy and Ted would have put it in those days, to God.

How ought a man to live?

There seemed something to be said for living like Sir Galahad. "Crom" Price may not have obeyed instructions and learnt Sir Galahad by heart, but he almost certainly had read and re-read him, and all the rest of Tennyson up to date. The whole set were very keen Tennysonians. As for Morris, he was not only "heart and soul" for the Order, but also—since Dixon was right about him—properly qualified.

"My strength is as the strength of ten  
Because my heart is pure."

The curious part of it was, Morris *must* have had the strength of ten, because in his not very long life he did the work of at least ten men.

Then came the question, how did Sir Galahad live? Clearly there were some things he did not do. He never took his ease, or courted the smiles or the love of women. What he did was to "carve the casques of men," and fight his way through every obstacle that the fury of nature and the malice of human adversaries placed before him, till he found the Holy Grail. He lilted along comfortably enough, the post-Victorian critic may feel, to his high destiny, with rather the same impregnable self-sufficiency, the same disingenuous straightlacedness about him as preserved "little Alice," the thwarted Queen of the May, from excess of despair when she went unexpectedly into a decline. This was not how the friends at Oxford saw him. They did not know their Keats, or they might have been disappointed with Tennyson for going out on so many of his excursions without the wings of fancy. They did not know their Blake, or they would have felt, as Topsy did soon after, that Tennyson's symbolism was inclined to be wooden. But on the whole Topsy thought Sir Galahad "rather a mild youth," and he represented to him singleness of heart and faith in a mission to be fulfilled.

It was fairly clear what casques one was to carve. The casques of the materialist and of the churchman whose doctrine was all wrong. In 1854, when Archdeacon Wilberforce went over to Rome, Morris almost made up his mind to go too; so impressed was the earnest young man

by the *Enquiry into the Principles of Church Authority*. When this crisis was over, theology began to lose its hold on him.

Something also began to happen to Sir Galahad ; for the Paladin whom Morris himself revealed in " A Christmas Mystery " four years later was neither Tennyson's hero nor the subject of the famous picture by Watts which spinster aunts in the late Victorian period regularly gave to their nephews to take to school. If the other Galahad had been " rather a mild youth," what a tender flower of sensibility was this one ! It was a Galahad palely loitering, like a certain other knight-at-arms, with all that poor soul's feeling for the exquisite changefulness of nature, and all his hankering for faery kisses ; the difference was, this Galahad endured to the end, and not because he had the strength of ten, but because he was completely humble.

The Sir Galahad of Topsy knew what he was resigning better than why he resigned it. He could not help thinking of Sir Palomides :

" For unto such a man love-sorrow is  
So dear a thing unto his constant heart,  
That even if he never win one kiss,  
Or touch from Iseult, it will never part."

He could not help thinking of Launcelot, and Guenevere, and autumn leaves, and damosels kissing their lovers farewell.

It is a story of heroism, not of justice or worldly common sense.

How ought a man to live ? He cannot on

earth live cheerfully out of society, but if society does not give scope to his nobler qualities it is not a good society—better perhaps abandon happiness and even life than stay a member of a rotten body.

To young Morris other perfections came before justice. He and his friends at Oxford were not precisely hoping to “reform the world” With all their sentimentality the Brotherhood did not take too theoretical a view of human nature. Their world had not yet been thrown into confusion by Darwin’s revelation of man’s origin. It was probably easier then than it has been since to contemplate the individual in the light of eternity, instead of only seeing him, as what he also is in the light of time, a participant in the uncertain movement, usually thought of as progress, which is evolution.

Since Darwin theories have pullulated. After a moment of blushing and vertigo the world sprang forward again, with even louder hurrahs What with the machines grinding faster and faster, and the fittest so busily and *lawfully* surviving, the millennium seemed truly impending.

The fittest were surviving—but at what expense? At the expense, ultimately, of a whole class of worse than slaves: the “destitute residuum,” the “submerged tenth”—in a word, the poor devils with no regular work, no proper homes, no decency, no prospects but perdition. It is small wonder that a passion for social

justice inflamed many virtuous young men in the late Victorian era.

The Brotherhood, Topsy and Ted and the others—early Victorians in their youth—were still privileged to discover for themselves in peace that justice is, like reason, a relation between two or more subjects. When injustice has laid its blight on a society, justice cannot suddenly be put before other perfections without a risk of a different but equivalent injustice being done. There was a moment in the later life of William Morris when he thought this risk, which he underestimated, ought to be taken. But the justice for the sake of which he was ready to see society overturn, or perish, was something more than the right of every man to an equal share of material wealth.

### III

It was not long before the original project for the Order of Sir Galahad was modified. On second thoughts, the Companions would not enjoin celibacy. If there were any wives, they could be “associated together” alongside of the husbands. The Order, men and women alike, were to devote themselves to charitable work in the London slums. In a moment of depression Ted thought he would like to join the army and go and get killed in the Crimea; the world seemed so wicked, and the casques to be carved so numerous and malignantly tough.

But the recognition of women was a sign of

cheerfulness. Coming when it did, one may attribute it to the influence of a Mr. and Mrs. MacLaren, to whom Topsy and Ted had been introduced in their first year by a Balliol friend. MacLaren was a fencing master and proprietor of a gymnasium in Oriel Lane, who lived with his charming and clever young wife at Summertown, where, in an orchard, he had a pretty house to which he regularly invited the two to dinner. They liked the MacLarens, and had their eyes opened to the beauties of domesticity.

Intelligent undergraduates are prodigiously new-born; they learn the commonplaces of life over again from the beginning, and only accept from intimate experience, or the demonstration by trusted friends, the simple categories which may seem the barest necessary for a conception of humanity. Topsy and Ted had met women, married women, and knew something about hearths and homes, and happy ones too; but, being born again, they had to have the familiar situations re-enacted specially for them, and to interpret them anew for themselves. They were impressed by the MacLarens; they accepted them. They were lucky to have made their acquaintance, Oxford being in those days so very monastic still. Probably something about the way Mrs. MacLaren poured out tea, or arranged the flowers with deft touches and her head a little on one side, had the effect of a revelation on those two. At any rate, the influence of the MacLarens, friends of Topsy's and Ted's own

making, did as much to humanise the canons of the Order, as that of all the married couples whose friendship ran, so to speak, in the Morris and Burne-Jones families.

Ted had known, since the year before coming up, the parents and sisters of his school friend, Harry Macdonald. The eldest of the little girls, Georgiana, was eleven when Ted had first gone to the house. She remembered everything about him after that visit—his pallor, the shape of his forehead, his light grey eyes and the power that “simply radiated” from them. He had an affectionate manner with the children, but rather frightened the baby when he pulled faces to amuse her. Gallant he was not—little Georgiana never forgot a rhyme he repeated that went :

“Hear the ladies when they talk ; tittle tattles, tittle tattle ;  
Like their pattens when they walk , pittle pattle, pittle  
pattle.”

The Macdonalds were in Birmingham for three years ; after that term Mr. Macdonald, like every Wesleyan Methodist parson, had to be resigned to changing his congregation. He was transferred to London. There, at the Royal Academy, in the last year of the friends at Oxford, Georgiana first met Morris. Wilfred Heeley introduced them. “He was very handsome,” she wrote half a century later, the scene perfectly fresh in her mind, “of an unusual type—the statues of mediæval kings often remind me of him—and at that time he wore no moustache, so that the

drawing of his mouth, which was his most expressive feature, could be clearly seen. His eyes always seemed to me to take in rather than to give out. His hair waved and curled triumphantly."

Topsy said "How d'you do" to the little girl and went on looking at Millais' painting, "The Rescue." This time it took him more than a fortnight to recognise the friend of a lifetime, the one perhaps who in her gentle way was to understand him better than all the rest.

Georgie already knew that Topsy was a poet, and she had heard from Ted that he was sure to be a great man. Fulford, trying to guess the high destinies of his friends, had put down Dixon for the Laureateship. Then, one night in the Christmas term of 1854, Topsy had produced his poem, "The Willow and the Red Cliff." Fulford's candidate listened with awe to these first verses by one who was verily going to come near being Tennyson's successor. He felt "it was something the like of which had never been heard before." Being a careful sort of person, Dixon made four copies of the poem. And he was right again; the star of a new great poet had arisen.

The Brotherhood had been meeting regularly to read Shakespeare together. Topsy and Ted did a good deal of additional reading on their own; that is, Topsy read aloud to Ted: Topsy could never bear to be read to. Luckily for his friends his declamation was good, even very good. On one of their Shakespeare evenings he impressed the company especially with his Claudio, and in

particular with the emotion with which he spoke the line "Ay, but to die, and go we know not where!"

To die—that would mean leaving behind this beautiful world: the enchanted forest and its horn-beams, the waters and willows of Oxford, and Sinodun Hill, that

"moveless wave wherewith the meadow heaves  
Beneath its clover and its barley-sheaves,"

and Gothic churches everywhere with their interesting brasses, and the towers and spires of Rouen—which might point to heaven, but were mainly dear, really, for their own sakes. (He had written to Crom, of Rouen, where he had been in the summer vacation: "No words can tell you how its mingled beauty, history, and romance took hold of me.") To die: the thought was desolating to the soul of this young humanist, because he loved so much; but though fear—or not so much fear as horror—of death haunted him all his life, he lived as another great man said one should: he lived as if he expected to live for ever, and never spared himself. How deplorable it is, say the Watts-Duntons, in opposition to the Wagners, that men of genius will not be sensible! Will not husband their strength or take proper exercise!

Morris might have lived to a riper age if he had not been mad about beauty; this passion for beauty was the key to all his works and ways, to his love of life and his loathing of death.

Would there be fellowship in the grave? Would there be a dearest Crom to write long letters to, full of one's many, and puzzling, and priceless earthly experiences? "My dearest Crom, . . . I have been in a horrible state about my writing; for I seem to get more and more imbecile as I go on." He had only just started! "Dearest Crom, . . .!"—(about Shelley's "Skylark")—"WHAT a gorgeous thing it is! utterly different to anything else I ever read . . . almost all beautiful writing makes one feel sad, or indignant, or—do you understand, for I can't make it any clearer; but 'the Skylark' makes one feel happy only; I suppose because it is nearly all music, and that it doesn't bring up any thoughts of humanity, but I don't know either." Here spoke the Morris for whom the subjective pleasures and pains of romanticism were not going to be enough.

#### IV

Crom got long letters from France when Topsy with Ted and Fulford were on the critical expedition of summer, 1855, taking their fill of Gothic. Topsy walked the eighteen miles from Clermont to Beauvais in carpet slippers, but even that did not make him grateful to the railway train, which he hated with a Ruskinian hatred: "the nasty, brimstone, noisy, shrieking railway train that cares not twopence for hill or valley, poplar tree or lime tree, corn poppy or blue corn-

flower . . .” Paris he consented reluctantly to visit. They took him to the Opera—Alboni in *Le Prophète*—“ Jones was enraptured ; Morris seemed a good deal bored.” The real Prophet did not like the make-believe one, and was probably annoyed by the sight of the ample and elegant elderly ladies crowned with tiaras, to the likes of whom Opera rather tends to belong. Atmosphere of polite “ bravos ” and “ bravas,” murmurings of “ divine ! ” and twirling of moustachios : was it so very civilised, or was there, surprisingly, something barbaric about the dowagers, in their panoply of precious stones, sitting ceremoniously for hours through aria and recitative and chorus beside their lords and masters ? A sacrifice to culture—a cult : the wearing of the stones—a rite, something between “ showing the flag ” (to the gallery) and a *séance* of white magic meant to attract yet more diamonds to those symbolic coiffures ?

Tolstoy, who wanted people to be like peasants, and Morris, who wanted them to be artists and craftsmen, both found opera an insufferable form of art : false and fat, and futile. . . .\*

Though Topsy had not yet decided that *everyone* must care for art to live a good life, and not only care for it but be able to practise it, the turning-point of his own youth was reached a few days after the friends had shaken the dust of the boulevards off their feet. The same applied to Ted. These two were at Le Havre, walking

\* Morris did like light-hearted opera, Mozart for instance.

by night on the quay. Here they definitely made the decision to devote their lives to art ; Ted was to be a painter, and Topsy an architect.

About this resolve on the part of the two undergraduates in their third year there was nothing perverse, considering that Ted had already clearly shown that he had an eye for drawing, and Topsy was celebrated for his knowledge of everything to do with Gothic. He was now drunk with it too. Perverse, no : highly unconventional, though. Topsy was aware that a lady in his mother's position could not be expected to look on any of the arts as quite a suitable vocation for her son. Architecture was perhaps the most respectable of them. Painting was of course disreputable, or rather painters were. But Pre-Raphaelitism was being ignored by the middle class, and not because they would have preferred Cézanne. (Now opera *was* an art they approved of !) Writing of Pre-Raphaelitism, the sister of Mrs. William de Morgan says : " I do not recall through my girlhood hearing one expression of approbation either in regard to the work itself or to the spirit which animated the workers." In fact this was the beginning of the age when people, if they did want art, would have liked it to come into existence somehow without the interposition of the artists. Or if there had to be artists, let them be elderly Royal Academicians from the cradle ; all young and struggling artists were Bohemian scoundrels.

Morris could not help knowing that his family would be none too pleased to hear that he meant to give up the Church for art. But though he was of age and master of his own fortune, he took the trouble to write very explicitly and tactfully to his mother, to reconcile her if possible to his changed plans. Having dropped a hint while at home, he now wrote from Oxford. He said he was afraid she might be vexed, but hoped to persuade her that all would be for the best. She was not to think the money she had spent on his education had been thrown away : Oxford had given him "the love of friends true and faithful," and had taught him "to hate any form of sin, and to wish to fight against it" ; also let her make no mistake—"an University education fits a man about as much for being a ship captain as a Pastor of souls."

Architecture, he observed, was a useful trade. "It will be rather grievous to my pride and self-will," he said (and it is to be hoped this made Mrs. Morris smile), "to have to do just as I am told for three long years, but good for it too, I think. . . ." He was not doing himself justice. Three years—there were few techniques William Morris was not talented to master in one. He really was a modest young man ; he even thought little of his verse, because it seemed so easy to write.

The letter ends with mention of George Edmund Street, to whom he intended apprenticing himself for those three years of chains and

slavery. Mrs. Morris could hardly have failed to be persuaded that her son meant to be no "idle objectless man."

The decision once taken, and no difficulties being put in his way, Morris's demigod-like energies burst out like the sun at summer noon. He worked for his Pass degree, planned with Dixon *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, for which he was to take the financial responsibility, and he read and he wrote, and he ran up a record-breaking bill for smashed sticks and foils at MacLaren's gymnasium. He and Ted had lately discovered Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. He had also got a copy of William Allingham's new book of poems, and was inspired to try his hand at wood-engraving by a picture cut by Dalziel after a design by Rossetti.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### I

How ought a man to live ?

Rossetti had a simple answer : a man ought to live by painting pictures. What ! asked a supercilious don, is *every* man to paint ? With the aplomb of Wilde, who succeeded him in carrying on the tradition of keeping prosaic common sense in its place, Rossetti answered unhesitatingly, Yes.

Early during the first of the three years he was going to spend doing just what he was told, Morris met Rossetti, and was touched by the historic spell.

Burne-Jones had been introduced to Rossetti at the Working Men's College, and he was now studying in London, living in furnished rooms and beginning his career of painter. Morris was mainly in Oxford, where Street had his office, and there till Easter he did what he was told with terrific energy from Monday till Saturday, while somehow finding time to write prose and verse, to model in clay, to carve in wood and stone, to illuminate, and to see his friends who were still up.

He also made a new friend in the office. Philip Webb, the senior apprentice, was one of the eleven children of an Oxford doctor. He had

already worked at Reading and at Wolverhampton, where the slums had made a sad and lasting impression on him. He was a fervent and at the same time a rather shy man ; and he and Morris understood one another from the first day. Morris seemed to him " like a wonderful bird just out of its shell."

In spite of having been brought up in Oxford in one of the most lovely of English Renaissance houses, Webb had grown up Gothic. After all, Gothic was the only style that was showing any animation at the time. So he and Morris admired together the designs Street submitted for his innumerable competitions, and tried not to be offended by the restorations he was engaged upon. (But when Webb set up on his own he eschewed competitions. As for restorations—he and Morris lived to become their chief adversaries.)

Meanwhile Morris was put on to making a copy of the doorway of St. Augustine's Church, Canterbury, a modern Gothic building. The atmosphere at Number 1 Beaumont Street must have been strange : Morris doing as he was told, and the office boy continually standing on his head. For this lad had a passion for Fenimore Cooper. His dreams were all of going to America one day to become a sort of belated Mohican. In preparation for this apotheosis he would practise standing on his head, an accomplishment which for some reason he believed would be indispensable in the Wild West.

Morris, when not copying, or drawing up

specifications, went on expeditions with Webb to country churches. On the first of these occasions he was afraid of not getting enough to eat. "It's all very well," he said as Webb marched him off, "but I shall starve." He really could not bear to go hungry, and his anxiety was justifiable: even to-day it is extraordinarily hard to find any food on the borders of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in the smaller villages. At the inns they expect you to be satisfied with liquor. And a biscuit or two would not have been much use to Morris, who, it must be supposed, got into the habit of taking along something substantial in a haversack. His appetite remained excellent in later days.

## II

A year ago Topsy and Ted had been fascinated by Rossetti's illustrations to Allingham's *Maids of Elfin Mere*, and their enthusiasm for the man had been fanned by Ruskin's *Edinburgh Lectures*. After Easter, Topsy, having taken his degree, made the week-end trip to London regularly, and saw more and more of Rossetti, who was being very helpful and encouraging about Ted; so now the moment had come when, as it has been put, "this sinner the two young men took for their saint."

A delightful, amusing person, whose magnetism and sly sense of fun hardly any one could resist; who was perfectly original, a brilliant

draughtsman and talker ; who scattered light and was rewarded with darkness and tragedy—Rossetti has been the victim of some very harsh judgments by posterity. They are morbid judgments, infected—odd tribute to his power—with his own morbidity ; judgments provoked by envy, one would think, or by jealousy, and tinged by the same xenophobia that has caused Disraeli to be represented as a “ mystery man.”

But Rossetti was of course the type of what Victorian middle-class society had least use for, and most feared and resented. He was a painter fond of beautiful women ; a man who took money (and gave it : quite as reprehensible) with obviously no profound feeling that it was sacred—what he did feel about it was that it was annoying not to have enough. And he was of foreign extraction, and wore a little beard unlike other beards, and got fat in a rather flabby, continental way, and married a lady the circumstances of whose unhappy death had to be investigated by a coroner, and finally he took to drugs, and by drugs was prematurely killed.

Posterity, which has managed to reason itself out of so many of the Victorian inhibitions, is yet on the whole hostile to Rossetti. One of the charges against him—made sometimes in such ungentlemanly language !—is that he was not a gentleman. The other is that he could not paint. The art of the Pre-Raphaelites does not appeal to the modern taste, and perhaps not to the best taste, but it is untrue that Rossetti could

not paint. As to his character, a future posterity (for none has yet been ultimate) may take into account the fact that people who knew Rossetti well found him lovable nearly as long as they could endure him, and that his friendships, when they were not permanent, lasted extraordinarily long for a man of such uncompromising self-will. His austere sister Christina held that he remained lovable in spite of all his weaknesses.

In August of the first (and last) year of Morris's apprenticeship Street moved his office to London. Burne-Jones had been living in Chelsea; now he joined Morris in rooms in Bloomsbury. Of Topsy and Ted, Rossetti wrote. "The nicest fellows in Dreamland," and of Topsy: "One of the finest little fellows alive, with a touch of the incoherent, but a real man." It sounds altogether patronising, but that was only Rossetti's unrespectful manner, and not lack of appreciation.

How should a man live? The spell was not yet complete when Morris wrote: "Rossetti says I ought to paint, he says I shall be able. . . . So I am going to try, not giving up architecture, but trying if it is possible to get six hours a day for drawing besides office work." In the case of almost any one but Morris this would have been proposing to do things by halves. He was for once almost cross with his boon companion when Ted hinted that his best drawings were too like Gabriel's. "I want to imitate Gabriel," cried Topsy, "as much as I can."

The importance of the effect on Morris of Rossetti's superb egoism need not be belittled, and must not be misinterpreted. Rossetti's sort of blasé grand manner was an education for his strenuous young friend. It gave his mind a change. Nobody could have been less like Sir Galahad than Gabriel. It ought really to be obvious that Topsy's passionate identification of himself with Gabriel, a fine tribute to the master, was nothing if not a characteristic piece of Topsyishness.

What Gabriel did for Topsy was to give him moral support for his innate sense that art is infinitely precious, and does not have to be justified by being treated as only a means to an end beyond itself. The more one was like Gabriel, the more one loved art for its own sake and without reservations. As Topsy happened to have been born a prophet, he could never quite go the whole way, and think of art as apart from the world, and its joys, its sorrows, and its needs, and only be loving beauty and regretting its absence. And whereas Gabriel was on his own good terms with the world, quite content in an almost conventional way to be a realist when he was not being a romantic, Topsy's nature required a synthesis, and that is why he is "among the greatest of those who prepare the last reconciliation, when the Cross shall blossom with roses."

If he had been as chaste as Sir Galahad, Gabriel would still have been widely condemned,

in his own time and to-day, for being one of those artists who prefer borrowing to doing their work of conviction in the intervals of painting lampshades or menu-cards at a few pence the article—who believe, in fact, that they have something unique to give the world, something not merely valuable, but invaluable; spiritual, personal, absolute. Gabriel believed this about himself, and luckily for him Ruskin was of the same opinion.

Ruskin's father, a wine merchant, had respected art, and been the patron of his son's genius. About this time (1856) Ruskin, adding patronage to genius, was making life tolerable for both Gabriel and his lady-love, Lizzie Siddal, by paying in advance for pictures on which they were engaged, or pictures not yet started. Gabriel owed more than that to Ruskin. It was Ruskin's championship of Pre-Raphaelitism that had given status to the movement. More recently his *Edinburgh Lectures* had confirmed Topsy in his faith in the star of Gabriel. In this way he had been one of the indirect causes of Gabriel being assured of a source of income that was to flow for the best part of twenty years.

Ruskin had been much attacked for his advocacy of Pre-Raphaelitism, which, according to one widespread view, "left to itself, would have passed away . . . exciting, at most, a momentary smile in the lively, or extorting a passing sarcasm from the saturnine." Such was the singular prudish materialism of the age that the very idea of art being ambitious enough to

want to live of its own, and have its own canons and ideals, was revolting not only to the general public, but—as the above eloquent quotation shows—to the editorial staff of the *Art Journal*. Ruskin was not intimidated, and he stood by these painters who alleged that they found in their principles “freedom from corruption, pride, and disease.”

Pre-Raphaelitism was one of those revivals of painting which have occurred from time to time, and are diverse except in one particular: they have all involved going back to nature. Art, like man, needs an occasional country holiday. Giotto went into the fields and sketched the rocks and the sheep, and that was the beginning of modern painting. Theodore Rousseau flung himself down among the trees and listened to the sighing of the wind, and a new school of landscape painting was born. Of the three most important members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood two, Hunt and Millais, also went back to nature—nature in the sense of rocks and sheep and trees. Rossetti went back to *human* nature, to man, and especially to woman. Rossetti painted living women, women of flesh and blood, instead of the pseudo-classical abstractions that were the stock-in-trade of the mid-Victorian Academy. Long before the battle that was to rage in Paris over Manet’s “Olympia,” Rossetti was in the field, painting not nudes indeed, nor even women in modern dress, but women who for all their fancy dress were creatures of living emotion or living frigidity. The ghost of Lizzie,

known as "Beata Beatrix," cuts a more substantial figure than all those dawdling Junos of Leighton, Alma Tadema, and Poynter, for whom the Academy persisted in reserving so much room on its walls right into the twentieth century.

When it is considered that Gabriel had been a man of importance for some years already as a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, credit must be allowed him for his uncondescending patronage of the young Topsy and Ted. Money he could not offer them. He could and did try to help them sell their pictures. If Topsy cared to buy some too, that was quite right and proper. Gabriel sat up late at night talking to them, expounding his theories, being himself; introducing them to his friends; taking them to the theatre and making them walk out in the middle of the performance if he felt bored. When he talked he seemed to both of them as "one having authority"; they both use the same phrase when writing about him. What he urged them to do was their own work in their own way. They were not to be bludgeoned by any one's prejudices, not even by his.

Nor were they. Ted was soon painting unmistakable Burne-Joneses, and Topsy was fulfilling his destiny even while trying to be like Gabriel.

### III

For Topsy the year 1856 was a busy and an uneasy one. He turned out to be the most

prolific contributor to *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, for which he wrote prose and verse, including one of his for ever charming lyrics: "Pray but one Prayer for me." He appointed Fulford editor of the "Mag.," paying him £100 for editing it for the twelve months that it lasted. The venture cost him several hundreds of pounds. Fulford was the only one who made any money out of it. Rossetti wrote to a friend who hoped to get a poem taken. "I fear tin is out of the question, as I think *all* contributors write for love or spooniness."

Then towards the end of the year came the awkward moment when Topsy had to break it to his mother that he meant to give up architecture for painting. Architecture was a useful art; it involved three years of salutary discipline; Mr. Street was an honourable man; and so, dear mother. . . . But painting!

Though Mrs. Morris was not relentless, it is said she never quite forgave Burne-Jones for what was no more his fault than Rossetti's. Morris's short, fidgety, inspired fingers had been scribbling designs for years already on any odd bit of paper that came handy, and his fate to be a great decorative artist was written in the sand. Painting was a step in the inevitable direction.

Before and after the interview with his mother, Morris's nervous temper was exacerbated. A friend, calling at the house in Bloomsbury, was saluted by a hail of books from the

first-floor windows. "Oh, never mind, sir," the servant girl reassured him as she opened the door, "it's only the master composing." He painted with the same furor. Georgiana Macdonald, now safely affianced to Ted, remembered him on a visit to Oxford this summer "painting a tree in MacLaren's beautiful garden with such energy that it was a long time before the grass grew again on the spot where his chair had stood."

At this time the love and support of his friends were a great blessing. Crom's sister thought him fascinating. "I think he is the most splendid fellow," she told Crom; "I don't wonder at your all loving him so, and his face is really beautiful." He had grown his beard. Perhaps Miss Price rather emphasised that his face was beautiful instead of saying simply that *he* was, because he had been getting rather stout, and with his broad shoulders and short legs was not of an ideal stature. But he must have been a singular, romantic, Bohemian figure; slovenly, genial, and with thunderbolts in his eyes.

Romantic and Bohemian is how the life that Topsy now embarked on in Red Lion Square may with truth be described. Ted shared with him; Gabriel had been responsible for their move to the unfurnished rooms at number 17 which he himself had once occupied. The rent was a pound a week for three rooms on the first floor, and the change was a boon to Ted, who was poor.

They lived in considerable disorder, among canvases, tools of all sorts, and furniture designed by Topsy and carried out by a local carpenter. It had been impossible to find in the shops any that Topsy would put up with. His ideas for chairs were extraordinary; Rossetti called them "incubi and succubi," and decorated some of them. Incubi and succubi or not, they were the precursors of a renaissance. Ruskin visited the lodgings: "Your father, sir," the maid announced him to Ted. He was very friendly to "his dear boys," but as things fell out he did not see a good deal of Topsy.

There is a romance which is the mere cupboard love of the notion of remote things. The true romantic has an urgent sense of all that it is in his nature to desire: all that is still unattained and unfulfilled. His criteria he seeks where alone such things are likely to be found—in the past. Feeling that it would be a privilege to take for his masters the great heroes, or geniuses, or lovers, or martyrs, out of whose dust all that is noble and beautiful seems to have grown, he has nothing about him of the callow and upstart character of a mere insurgent. His romanticism is the unsatisfied hunger of one who divines what it must be like to be filled—filled with love, or with triumphant content at having painted a perfect picture, or given a better code of laws to the state, or done any of a thousand deeds.

The romantic is not, therefore, apt to be a prominent upholder of convention. Convention-

ality is an art of living and Bohemianism a kind of adverse criticism of it. The conventional art of life seldom makes a very favourable impression on artists ; it has never yet been enough for the prophets. The true romantic is in nine cases out of ten a Bohemian as well. Even in the tenth case he is seldom "Society."

Morris was both romantic and Bohemian, and at times pretty eccentric into the bargain, as if he were an aristocrat with a title. And his powers of creation were fully commensurate with his sense of the unfulfilled. When he was specially out of temper in the early Red Lion Square days it was from suffering for not yet having found out where to direct those powers. He was not used to them yet, and not sure of himself. How ought a man to live? Like Gabriel he still told himself ; but his hand and eye knew a better answer.

There was a conflict. He was not happy.

His Bohemianism (than which nothing could have less legitimately sprung from his boyish High Church leanings) was at first almost exclusively a criticism levelled at the shiftless and unhandy aspects of conventional society. The men one met all dressed up at dinner parties were too sedate to be properly mad about anything. Or if they had a subject, they commonly knew and cared about nothing else. The whole of his life Morris chose his friends among people who preferred the studio and the workshop to even the most polite drawing-room, and when he



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JOHN RUSKIN AND D G ROSSETTI

was a young man struggling with problems in Bloomsbury his manners, if he happened to be in a drawing-room, left a good deal to be desired. Consistently Gothic, he disdained to cultivate the graces which are so charming, when they are spontaneous, in the Latins, and agreeable enough when they are put on for the occasion. The French wife of Boyce, the painter, found Topsy odious: coarse, noisy, and repellent. She could not see *him* dangling pretty boxes of chocolates like any one genuinely *bien élevé*.

Morris's eccentricity took various forms. One of them was his treatment of maid-servants. He treated them as if they were of the same genus as himself; as vassals, perhaps, but not as slaveys. His flow of bad language could be torrential. He would also, if very angry, beat his head against the wall, or bite the furniture—opportunity for any old-fashioned plain man or new-fangled critic to put him down as crazy.

And he was intensely fidgety when not busy, always twiddling his watch-chain, or scratching pictures and patterns wherever there was a blank space.

Then, in 1857, a new positive direction was given to his energies, the inspiration again being that of Gabriel, who had conceived the enterprise of the Oxford "frescoes." Much came out of this famous episode, but not exactly what Gabriel had projected, and of the lives concerned it was Topsy's that was to be the most influenced in the upshot.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### I

PRETTY well all Oxford undergraduates must know the name of the Sarah Acland Nursing Home.

Sarah Acland was the wife of a doctor and scientist, who for half a century was one of the great figures in the University and City. Henry Acland had been at Christ Church with Ruskin. They became friends. Ruskin was interested and charmed by the inborn graces of the young country gentleman of an old family. Acland highly appreciated the natural genius of the strange middle-class mother's darling. In 1854, when Morris was up—but during the vacation—Dr. Henry Acland by his science and courage saved Oxford from what might have been a very serious cholera epidemic. There were cases: Acland quickly had them isolated, and that and other measures he took prevented the plague from spreading. In the same year he at last won his battle for the Oxford Museum, that "cockatrice's den" as one clergyman called it, where in future science was to be taught. Acland, as all who knew him were aware, was a religious man; at the crisis, Pusey came forward and supported him, feeling that "under the guidance

of a man of Acland's disposition and character the hidden laws of the natural world might be studied without danger by the Oxford undergraduates." The scale was turned, though only by the narrow margin of four votes.

Next, the Museum had to be built. The favoured design was by the Irish architect, Woodward, "a grave and curiously silent man," and the style variously described as Rhenish and Veronese Gothic: it has latterly been called by harder names. However, the choice pleased Acland, and also his friend Ruskin, and Ruskin intended to get Rossetti to come and design flower-and-beast borders for the windows, and wonderful capitals that he would find some of the money for. Woodward, genuinely anxious to be true to the spirit of Gothic, sent to Ireland for the talented sculptor O'Shea and other craftsmen, who were to carve original decorations on the building; and Ruskin himself laid the bricks for one of the columns. But the column had to be rebuilt by professional hands, the work of O'Shea was cut short because some of the subjects he chose offended the authorities, and Rossetti never co-operated at all.

When, however, Woodward went on to building the Debating Hall for the Oxford Union Society, Rossetti took it into his head that it would be a good plan to paint the ceiling with pictures illustrating the Arthurian legend, of which so much was being heard just then.

Rossetti was already acquainted severally

with the mute Woodward ("the silliest creature that ever breathed out of an oyster shell") and Acland ("the Rose of Sharon"). Recently, through his young friends Topsy and Ted, he got to know Oxford a little from the inside; he had become something of a lion there, and the idea of working at the Union was pleasant. So Gabriel and Ted went off to Walthamstow to discuss details with Topsy.

Negotiations had been pretty satisfactory. The ten bays over the gallery in the Debating Hall were to be decorated: expenses paid by the Union; the artists otherwise to work for love—or "spooniness." So one day in the summer of 1857, for the third time, in a third capacity, William Morris went to Oxford.

Oxford, to Morris, was first and last an eternal city. He slipped quite easily into an objective attitude towards it, and did not predominantly consider its relationship to himself.

The normal young man comes back, and as he walks down the High Street naturally broods a little over his own part in the history of the thoroughfare, and thinks. "Here is where I ran into So-and-so that famous day when Something-or-other happened," or, seeing a familiar face on the far side of the road: "H'm, I wonder whether he still gives those absurd parties; and whether he and Blank have made up their quarrel"—or even, if it is a fine day! "How picturesque the place is! I don't believe I did it justice when I was up."

Morris had not the virtues of the gossip—the social ease, the discursiveness, the sympathetic proclivity to be introspective in the kind of way that make a man acutely sensitive to sociable incidents of his own past. He came back to Oxford amazingly uncluttered, detached, devoted, neither seeking notoriety nor nervous about what any one might think of his beard and his Bohemianism. He had friends up—Faulkner and the MacLarens, for instance—and he loved being with them, but parties—no: Gabriel enjoyed them, and so did the mild Ted: to Topsy the best use for a white tie seemed using it as string to hang up paint-brushes with. During the next months he was tremendously active. Besides painting at the Union—where he was the first to start and the first to finish—he experimented in several arts and crafts, had no time for tea-parties and preferred not to go out to dinner. What he sometimes liked in the evening for amusement was a game of cribbage with Faulkner.

With Burne-Jones and Rossetti he began by taking rooms at 87 High Street. Val Prinsep, who was to be one of their colleagues, drove to see them on his arrival and stayed to dinner. “I was cordially received. ‘Top,’ cried Rossetti, ‘let me introduce Val Prinsep.’ ‘Glad, I’m sure,’ answered the man in spectacles, nodding his head, and then he resumed his reading of a large quarto. This was William Morris. . . . When dinner was over, Rossetti, humming to himself, as was his

wont, rose from the table and proceeded to curl himself up on the sofa. 'Top,' he said, 'read us one of your grinds.' 'No, Gabriel,' answered Morris, 'you have heard them all.' 'Never mind,' said Rossetti, 'here's Prinsep who has never heard them, and, besides, they are devilish good.' 'Very well, old chap,' growled Morris, and having got his book he began to read in a sing-song chant. . . . All the time he was jiggling about nervously with his watch-chain. Morris read his "Eve of Creçy." At the end of the evening the robust Val Prinsep went away very much impressed by all he had seen and heard.

It is curious that no one should have told Rossetti, since he was unaware of the fact, that tempera on damp brick was not fresco, and, moreover, that under no name could such a technique possibly have been successful. Ruskin, who both knew how walls had been prepared by the Italian painters, and that the new methods that were to be employed at the Union involved no preparation at all, said nothing: he half expected a miracle from Rossetti and the other dear boys—and then, "you know," he wrote to William Rossetti, the other half resigned, "the fact is they're all the least bit crazy, and it's very difficult to manage them." The painting of those evanescent pictures was really a superb extravaganza, a pageant of shining ineptitude on which a good deal of talent was spent, and not entirely thrown away; the business was such fun in itself, and there were unforeseen consequences.

Webb was called on for advice because he knew about architecture, Faulkner because he was learned in geometry, and besides Gabriel, Ted, Topsy, and Prinsep, the artists concerned, were Hughes, Stanhope, and Pollen. And all Oxford looked on, and the world outside was amused.

The subject Rossetti chose was "Lancelot's Vision of the San Graal"—Lancelot asleep being drawn from Burne-Jones. The thoughtful and wary Ruskin was ready to spare his protégé the nuisance of making such efforts for mere spooniness; he wrote to Rossetti: ". . . If you like to do another side of the Union I will consider that as seventy guineas off my debt, provided there's no absolute nonsense in it, and the trees are like trees and the stones like stones." But what with one thing and another Rossetti did not get on very fast. Lizzie Siddal fell ill, and he absented himself to be with her; and he was simultaneously engaged on an altar-piece for Llandaff Cathedral. For a figure in this he used Morris as model.

And what subject did Morris choose? He went back pathetically to his Sir Palomides: "Sir Palomides watching Tristram and Iseult," perfect symbol of his aching inferiority-complex. The pure in heart have other sufferings to endure besides the particular pangs of continence; among them this challenge, so subtly cruel, that they must be alike too brave and too humble to take up, this bitter gibe at themselves by themselves. Morris believed himself unattractive.

He thought no woman would ever love him. Nature could not have revenged herself more unmercifully on one of his temperament, for his fastidiousness, than by making him vividly fancy he was to be lonely for ever and for ever.

So he dashed vigorously and full of melancholy at Sir Palomides, covering himself with paint, not suspecting that his Iseult was now near him in time, as for years she had been near him in place. A high academic personage, coming with some ladies to see how the frescoes were getting on, took the bearded man on the scaffolding to be a builder's assistant, and addressed him rather peremptorily. The future democrat, most indignant, responded with such a bombardment of oaths that the party sought safety in flight, Burne-Jones murmuring, when the air had cleared a little: "O tempera! O Morris!" Morris designed a suit of armour so that his colleagues should make no mistakes over details when they were painting knights, and a local smith hammered it out for him. When it was ready he tried it on, and then could not get it off, so there he was, "embedded in iron, dancing with rage and roaring inside." Even the kind Dr. Acland came in for some notable swearing when he had hurried round to the lodgings one day to extract a stone splinter from Morris's eye. The splinter had got there while he was carving a head of Crom Price. And besides painting, and designing armour, and carving in stone, Morris was writing some of the

poems that were to be published in the following year, together with *The Defence of Guenevere*, and also making experiments—like picking old stuffs to pieces, thread by thread—that were to result in the revival of the art of embroidery. When he had mastered the technique, with a thoroughness that did not come from imitating Gabriel, he straightway began a bird-and-tree pattern.

During the course of the Union adventure Gabriel made a new important conquest: Algernon Swinburne of Balliol. Swinburne was a delicate creature, of aristocratic family, highly strung, and liable to exalted and fanciful passions; and small and birdlike; and all ears for Gabriel's amusing talk about anything and everything in the world. Before going to Eton Swinburne had not even been allowed to read novels. Gabriel was prepared to lend him the most "shocking" books, and to discuss them. Gabriel was a Morning Star of that Reform of polite conversation that did not come till many years later. In short, the spell hastened Swinburne's emancipation. Soon he was championing political murder, to the great concern of Jowett, who was very anxious for Balliol not to "make itself ridiculous" over Swinburne as University had done over Shelley.

All the same, it was to Morris, not to Gabriel, that Swinburne owed the impetus which now carried him forward in his career. "Morris's work and temperament," says M. Lafourcade, "were calculated to affect Swinburne in an almost incredible manner at the stage he had

then reached." It was no use Topsy trying to subordinate his genius to Gabriel. His verse spoke for itself. No doubt there was a reading like the one for the benefit of Prinsep ; at any rate, " a few days, perhaps a few hours, after meeting Morris for the first time," Swinburne began *Queen Yseult*.

So much for the grandson of a lord ; but for Morris, and Rossetti too, there was to be a still more significant encounter—with the daughter of a man who kept a livery stable.

## II

As they stepped out one day from the " King's Head " in Holywell, Burne-Jones, Faulkner, and William Allingham saw a girl of extraordinary beauty.

It is not surprising that the young men were impressed. She was one of the great beauties of all time, and her stately and solemn loveliness, when they first set eyes on her, was rendered infinitely seductive by the freshness of her youth (she was sixteen years old) and the innocence of her mind.

The same night, at the theatre, Morris saw her. He had gone to the play with Rossetti, Hughes, and Burne-Jones, and the last-named identified her as the very " Stunner " (idiom of the middle Victorian era) who had so stunned him in the morning. Curious, that after eluding the friends for four years, during which they

might have met her any day in term-time, she should now reveal herself twice, at such a short interval.

Her face moved Morris profoundly.

The friends could not help recognising that besides being sensational for its high degree, her beauty was of an exotic and puzzling kind. Her darkness suggested to one that she might have a Jewish strain. Another, considering her olive complexion, thought perhaps gipsy blood, though gipsies tend to be small-boned people. Burne-Jones must chiefly have had regard to her profile, for his verdict was Greek. Others have reasonably supported the claims of Italy, pointing out that the girl had the full-moulded lips, the heavy eyelids, the majesty of a Michelangelo; and a theory was even mooted that the Burdens belonged to a mysterious stock of inbred families descended from the ancient Britons. But to this day there is no accepted explanation of how Jane Burden came to be beautiful in the way she was beautiful.

The Union coterie were intrigued, and lost no time. They were happily situated for getting to know young girls whose beauty attracted their attention. In the Pre-Raphaelite age it was natural for painters to seek out models with beautiful faces, as natural as, to the sophisticated, it would seem callow and absurd at the present day—art having taken a turn for the abstract. Mr. Burden did not need a great deal of persuasion to let his daughter sit for the company; the request was not odd, and the young men

seemed in order. Morris was soon at work trying to draw Jane, who had perhaps been bespoken chiefly for Rossetti, since it was his need for Madonnas and Gueneveres just then that was the most urgent. Prinsep and Hughes went hard at it too. Dressed up as Queen Guenevere in a room in George Street, she posed for the first of so many times. Morris fell deeply in love.

He did not get on very well with his drawing of Jane ; but he wrote a poem about her, called " Praise of My Lady," which is almost as striking a portrait of her as any one of Rossetti's in pencil or colour.

" My lady seems of ivory—  
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be  
Hollow'd a little mournfully.

*Beata mea Domina !*

Her forehead, overshadow'd much  
By bows of hair, has a wave such  
As God was good to make for me.

*Beata mea Domina !*

Her great eyes, standing far apart,  
Draw up some memory from her heart,  
And gaze out very mournfully ,

*Beata mea Domina !*

So beautiful and kind they are,  
But most times looking out afar,  
Waiting for something, not for me.

*Beata mea Domina ! "*

He was very smitten, writing at the phase of love-sickness which falls between Stendhal's two "crystallisations."

The last stanzas run :

“ All men that see her any time,  
I charge you straightly in this rhyme,  
What, and wherever you may be,  
*Beata mea Domina !*

To kneel before her , as for me,  
I choke and grow quite faint to see  
My lady moving graciously.  
*Beata mea Domina !*”

He was twenty-three ; as emotional and sincere as a romantic young poet could be ; a genius full of ardour and pity and tenderness ; a prophet ; and chaste. He was a young fellow without faith in his own amiability.

He was also a gentleman, and of independent means. Morris did not at any time make believe that there were no such things as class distinctions, witness his famous blunder at the meeting of Socialists in Dublin, made at the time when he was most bent on breaking those distinctions down : “ I was brought up a gentleman, and now as you can see associate with all sorts.”

And who was Jane, and what was she ? She was the beautiful, dreamy daughter of a man who hired out horses ; a friendly, rather inarticulate, obviously decent girl. Her new admirers did not assemble the certain facts about her in a nutshell like this, least of all Morris. Even at this distance, knowing how the situation worked itself out, one may well be dismayed by the risk Morris was about to take.

“ A chaste woman is divine : a chaste man is

ridiculous." Both parts of Wilde's asservation are open to criticism, and one might accept as an amendment to the second Benjamin Jowett's remark that a common fault in young men is that they idealise love too much. Morris's inexperience was by no means commensurate with his chastity, and for an obvious reason: he had a great poet's instinctive knowledge of the gamut of human passions. Burne-Jones would never read painful books: "Some people," he said, "do not have to be *made* to feel." Some people do not have to be sent to school to learn about love. Some people know from the beginning almost all they can ever know.

Morris's inexperience was Morris's character. He idealised love; he could never have been taught not to idealise it, and he was still doing so as an elderly man when he created the Ellen of *News from Nowhere*, and after. But he never formed a habit of idealising women. Though such a strapping, virile youth, he was already fastidious about carpets, cups and saucers, stained-glass windows, and even stitchery—it would have been very odd if he had not been fastidious about women. He would have made an extraordinarily clumsy lover of the kind of woman whose lover he would never have wanted to be. In that sense he was perfectly inexperienced. But that is not to say he only understood virtuous women.

What is certain is, that with his fastidiousness he combined an urge, of the sort that is

often wrongly called middle class, to be settled down, and have a home, and everything right and proper about him, like a good guildsman-burgher of the fourteenth century. His morbidity was limited to the Palomides inferiority-complex. He did not want, like Rossetti, to turn every interesting, lovely girl into a *femme fatale*.

Now here was Jane, and he had lost his heart to her ; and it was a question : was she a *femme fatale* whether they all wanted her to be or not ?

Jane was by nature nothing of the kind ; but she had much of the apparatus—her signal beauty, and that inarticulateness which was so dignified and controlled that it might, for all they knew, have been a mask for deep and strange passions. Large, beautiful people, when they are not vivacious, and given to brooding rather than many words, are mysterious to their lovers : like the full moon in summer when it hangs low over the treetops, hushing the stridor and strife, and dictating the dreams of mankind, they seem at once very near and very remote—so

“ Was Lancelot most glad when the moon rose  
Because it brought new memories of her.”

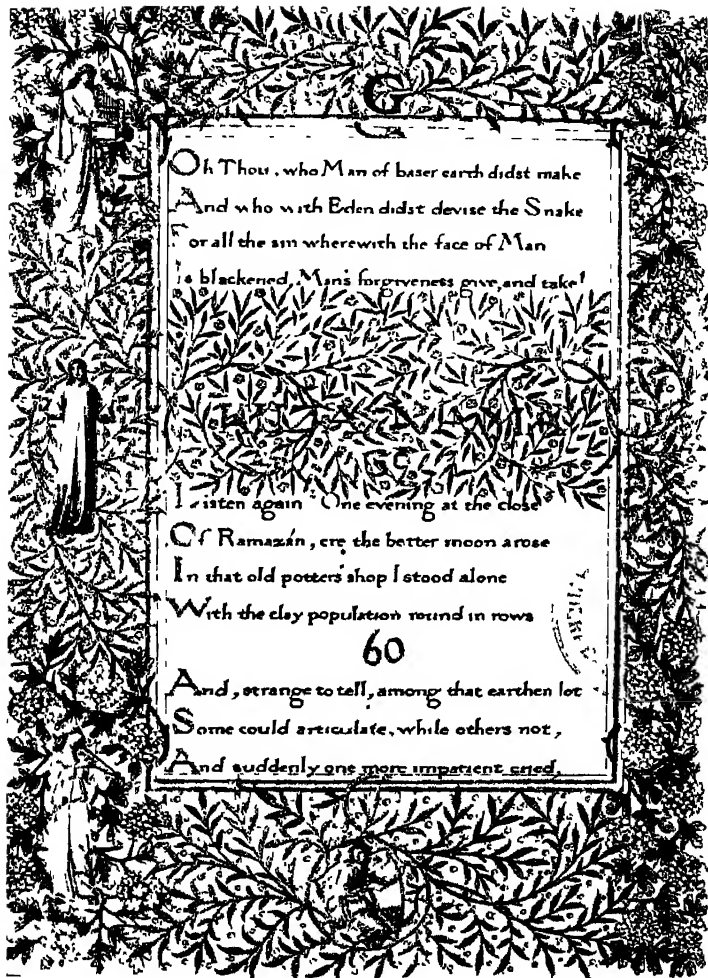
Endowed with not very much nervous energy, and also by the grace of destiny lacking ambition, Jane wore no mask, Jane cherished no hidden lusts. She had the matter-of-fact, unexalted outlook of the reasonable person who, not being an artist, is equally apt to be incommoded by dis-

comfort and embarrassed by zeal. Life is already so difficult : let us—it would have been in Jane to say—avoid upheavals : pray let us pursue our course with an even tenor. It was an odd galley for Miss Burden to find herself in : the company of Topsy and Gabriel ! But once she was on board, once she had signed on for the voyage, loyal she remained.

Topsy, a humble lover, had the rather awkward task of courting Jane under the eyes of Gabriel, whom Jane found romantic and charming—she did so frankly till her own death, long after his and Topsy's—Gabriel, whom Topsy himself was still determined to think peerless.

However, Gabriel was engaged to Lizzie, and though the inexperienced Topsy may not have been a man of the world in courtship, the aura of his splendid genius was steadily becoming clearer about his dark locks for all to see, and this was not without its effect on the susceptibilities of Jane. That he was a gentleman, and well off, were considerations that weighed with her too. She was sensible and had been carefully brought up. She became engaged to him in the early part of 1858.

We are left to guess what Mrs. Morris and the rest of the family thought of the match.



[Re produced by courtesy of the British Museum

## CHAPTER SIX

### I

WHEN in the summer of 1858 Morris went to Paris with Webb and Faulkner to row down the Seine—his last foreign holiday as a bachelor—he had already a discreet reputation.

In March had appeared *The Defence of Guenevere*. The little book of romantic poems had no popular success ; it sold less than two hundred copies, and not every one who read it thought it good. The editor of *Fraser's Magazine* found that "as to nineteen twentieths" the poems were "the most obscure, watery, mystical, affected stuff possible." On the other hand, Richard Garnett and Joseph Knight recognised their remarkable qualities at once, and Browning's opinion was : "The only new poems to my mind since there's no telling when."

*Guenevere* and the rest are still read with admiration by people who find *Jason* dull and *Sigurd* doggerel. Crammed into that first little collection, bursting from those mediæval scenes of lust and blood and sacrifice, are all the evidences of poetical genius. "Obscure, watery . . ."—absolutely no. The tormented soul of *Guenevere* cries out with a devastating shrillness : there the queen writhes, now humbly coaxing, now proudly

drawing herself up to invoke the fire from heaven ; and gleaming across the page one sees the grinning teeth of caitiff knights, and the chill of dungeons is conjured up, and strikes like a frightful miasma on the cheek. Those mediæval figures, so unbridled in their good and evil passions, are very explicit. With their reasonings and arguments they are prepared to ride trampling down the neat stanzas lest their grim meanings be left in doubt. The Middle Ages were dear to Morris, and he had (what is not very apparent in *Guenevere*) some illusions about them, but obviously far fewer than the twentieth-century man-in-the-street, who easily persuades himself that the whole period was no more than a series of variations on *The Haystack in the Floods*—a theme of rapine and murder.

George Moore picked out *Golden Wings* as the best example of Morris exercising that power to evoke vivid and gorgeous images which made his early verses seem like gallant necklaces, encrusted with gems, and flashing fires, green and sanguine and amethyst. "In *Golden Wings*," he says, "our eyes and ears enjoy equally, and so complete is our enjoyment, that whilst we read we clap our hands (speaking figuratively) and thank heaven that we have escaped at last from grey thoughtfulness into a world of things."

In a class by itself there is *Summer Dawn* :

"Pray but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips,  
Think but one thought of me up in the stars,"

which is exquisite, and has the lyrical detach-

ment that most of the other poems were not meant to have. A retrospective pronouncement of Algernon Swinburne on this Topsy, who stood swearing on the *quai* in Paris, was: "Not yet a master, he was assuredly no longer a pupil."

He was swearing because the boat had sprung a leak in its passage overland from Oxford. "You fellows seem very quiet," he said to his companions when he was feeling better: "What's the matter?" Then the crowd began to disperse, and the young Englishmen took steps to get their boat mended.

The trip was delightful. All went well till they reached a lock where Morris so offended the keeper that the indignant citizen did not let them out till he felt the offence had been expiated. Those were glorious days, with mediæval churches and bridges to see, and the cornfields of Normandy, the home of Gothic, a bracing, masculine sort of country, patching the green world with expanses of gold. They had *Murray's Guide* with them, but Morris as usual knew everything, or nearly: not always the worst. When they got near Pont-de-l'Arche he was all agog. "Now I'll show you fellows such a bridge!" When they had rounded the corner there was no bridge: it had been destroyed. And then, as Webb put it, "excitement and explosion."

*Murray's Guide* came in useful all the same. The margins did for scribblings of plans for the house that Morris wanted Webb to build him, and that Webb did build; the Red House at

Upton. Deriving its name simply from the red bricks of which it was made, and which were not stuccoed over, the Red House might have been so called to announce the revolution of which it was really itself a first instalment.

## II

The question : How ought a man to live ? changes its aspect when the young man who has been asking it at the university has gone out into the world, and is engaged to be married.

Not that it had needed Jane to give Morris a constructive impulse. His furniture designing at Red Lion Square, in the days before Jane, had been a significant development, just what might have been expected of the boy who had spent winter evenings netting at school. Jane, however, did evoke new theories, and marrying her meant that some of them would have to be put into practice.

A married man has responsibilities. To fulfil them satisfactorily he has to have enough money. Morris had enough money to go on with. Therefore, naturally, Morris being the sort of person he was, the question of how life was to be lived was all the more to the fore in his mind. He had no excuse for taking refuge from it in getting as much more money as he could in some convenient way, leaving himself no time for troublesome reflections, or leisure beyond what would be enough for perhaps collecting an occasional piece of antique furniture or making a hobby of brasses :

no excuse, and certainly no inclination. He was in a position to face the question of *a* good life if not of *the* good life, with time and money at his disposal.

By now his early other-worldliness had disappeared, because he no longer believed in the other world. This made the transition natural from a rather particular to a more general presentment of the question of the good life. The young theologian and Anglo-Catholic had asked himself: How ought I, William Morris, to live, despite the world, and to save my own soul? The grown-up was asking himself for the moment, more practically, less emotionally, but not less passionately: How ought I to live—a wealthy young married man of the middle class, and, in spite of that, a man of taste?

It was, in fact, not remote perfections but the Ideal Normal that he now set himself to pursue; and one thing at least seemed clear to him: that the first requisite for a good human life was a house, a home, and that it was intolerable that home should be anything but as beautiful as it could be made. The curious part of it is, that Morris wanting a proper home for Jane and himself—one might fancy a not very extraordinary want—led directly to revolution.

### III

One can imagine circumstances under which Morris would not have become a revolutionary,

but it is impossible to think of him in any society, historical or ideal, not being responsible for a Movement. And why? Definitely not because he was a busybody. He always had far too much business to do of his own to have time for interfering with other people's. Morris without a Movement is inconceivable because there was something about him and his doings that was highly contagious. Though in the modern world, for bad, unhappy reasons, prestige is supposed to attach to activity as such, the typically busy person invariably ends by repelling, as it is impossible not to discover that what he enjoys is the feeling of being busy, and not the things he is busy with. It was quite different with Morris.

When he was old and tired, but undaunted, a young poet of the new generation witnessed the contagion still unchecked, noting its symptoms and effects, and afterwards describing it as follows—one of the most illuminating tributes ever paid to Morris: "People much in his neighbourhood became gradually occupied with him or about his affairs, and without any wish on his part, as simple people become occupied with children."

Though the young poet—Mr. W. B. Yeats—did not try to account wholly for this peculiar influence that Morris exerted "without any wish on his part," he rather suggested that it must have been due partly to Morris's power of constantly "producing everywhere organisations and beauty."

This is as much as to say that the answer Morris gave in his life and personality to the question: How ought a man to live? was so convincing to whoever came into contact with him, that even "without any wish on his part" they wanted to be associated with him, and follow his lead. And that is why Morris without a Movement was impossible.

Under the circumstances the Movement was destined to be a Renaissance, of import to a far wider circle than Morris's friends and neighbours, and as the Renaissance turned out to be incompatible with a conservative attitude towards the political, social, and economic conventions of the age, it meant Revolution as well. It meant in the long run Morris denouncing the values that the world's middle class held sacred, and a direct chain of causes connected his attention to stained glass and wall-papers and other mild things of the kind, with his preaching Socialism at street corners when he was an elderly man.

The Movement may be said to have begun, then, before the Red House days, before the Union episode, upon Morris setting up with Burne-Jones in the rooms in Red Lion Square, where, numbered among the honourable pioneers, was the maid who cleaned and cooked for them. For Red Lion Mary was a victim of the contagion, and she would often sit with her frame embroidering designs by Mr. Morris, while Mr. Morris engraved a wood-block and Mr. Jones sketched out figures for a stained-glass window.

She was the right woman in the right place. "One day she, being in the room, perfectly quiet, neither moving nor speaking, Morris, whose work was presumably going awry, said to her fiercely, 'Mary, be quiet—don't make that insufferable noise,' and she answered, 'No, sir, I won't, sir.'" Red Lion Mary went on embroidering even after the young gentlemen had given their lodgings up, and did not quite give it up till she was a married woman and found it too much to combine with her household duties.

The first big result produced by the Movement was the Red House.

Morris and Jane were not able to take possession till the end of summer 1860. They were married at St. Michael's Church, Oxford, on the 26th April 1859, Dixon coming up from Lambeth to perform the ceremony, and Faulkner being best man. For their honeymoon they travelled abroad, and when they came back stayed in furnished rooms in Great Ormond Street till the Red House was ready to move into: habitable, that is to say, but not complete, since the idea precisely was that its interior decoration should be taken in hand by Morris and his friends, and worked out over a period of years. In fact, they meant to make it nothing less than the most beautiful house in the land.

About this time Ted also married his Georgie, and Gabriel his Lizzie, the latter pair being as ill matched as the former well. The Burne-Joneses married on £30, plus an unexpected advance of

£25 from that valuable friend, Mr. Plint, who deserves to be immortal as one of the kindest patrons in the history of English art. The money came in especially comfortingly, because a bad chill on top of the excitement of the occasion prostrated Ted on the outset of his honeymoon.

The Red House was built at Upton, Bexley Heath, in Kent, on a small plateau covered with cherry and apple orchards, near the ruins of an Augustinian Priory, and with pleasant views at hand down the valleys of the Cray and the Darent. It is a pity that Morris and Webb between them made the singular mistake of designing the place to face north; much more important, however, is the fact that they meant it to be a genuine work of architecture, and beautiful, and a setting for beautiful things.

Webb, with reservations, accepted the constructivist theory of architecture. He rejected the Gothic Revival heresy, and did not imagine that by repeating certain symbolic details one could be sure of making a fine house or church. He did not either, like the more robust architects of the present century, rush to the extreme of believing that beauty, in the case of all the useful arts, resides in bare structure, and is, upon a last analysis, the same thing as "fitness-for-purpose": most vain and grotesque of perversions! But he did bring structure and beauty into a sensible relationship. Morris, for his part, foresaw the possibility of a fitness-for-purpose æsthetic becoming the fashion, and abhorred the

prospect ; he abhorred the notion, as he once put it, that "the garment shall be unadorned, though the moth that frets it be painted with purple and gold."

The Red House was L-shaped, two stories high, with a high-pitched roof. The main evidence of Webb's constructivism was the turret in one corner, strictly justified by the staircase it carried inside. In the angle of the L stood a well-house with a red-tiled roof like a candle-snuffer. The garden "seems to have been the first of the modern square-plot and trained-hedge type." There were borders of rosemary and lavender, and "apples fell in at the windows as they stood open on hot autumn nights."

When Jane became the châtelaine of this interesting domain there was practically nowhere to sit down. In the drawing-room there loomed from the beginning the great settle from Red Lion Square, with a ladder to the top so that minstrels could go up and sing at Christmas, but as Burne-Jones embarked in this room on a series of frescoes illustrating the story of Sir Degrevaunt, and as most of the furniture was in the course of being specially made, the atmosphere could not have been very reposeful. On Georgie's first visit "the dining-room was not yet finished." Morris's studio, which was used as the living-room, must indeed have been "a most cheerful place," but not the feminine boudoir, all lace and cushions, and containing at least one or two ordinary comfortable chairs, that Jane might

reasonably have looked forward to enjoying in peace.

For it seems that she would easily, in any other place but under Morris's roof, and as his wife, have escaped the contagion, being naturally immune from enthusiasms. We have Georgie's word for it that she was happy, in spite of having to submit to a kind of forcible vaccination. Having discovered that she was good at embroidery, Morris "did not allow her talent to remain idle" So she fell in with the industrious habits of her husband and his friends, and probably preferred the work to the play, which was apt to be boisterous or even terrifying. Hide-and-seek, for instance: Edward hiding. "I see her tall figure and her beautiful face as she creeps slowly nearer and nearer to the room where she feels sure he must be, and at last I hear her startled cry and his peal of laughter as he bursts from his hiding-place."

Gradually the home grew more complete. The furniture, most of it designed by Webb, began to come in. Morris painted flower patterns in tempera on some of the walls, and Jane herself climbed on to the scaffolding to help paint the ceilings. Messrs. Powell's provided the glass, again from designs by Webb. On the floor were strewn Eastern carpets; nothing made at home would do. Nothing of any kind made in the ordinary course of commerce would do. This significant fact was about to lead to the formation of the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

## IV

It was becoming clear to Morris that in the province of visual art his peculiar vocation was that of a designer-craftsman, not of a painter of easel pictures. "I should have painted well," he once said, "as far as the execution is concerned, and I had a good sense of colour; but though I have, so to speak, the literary artistic memory, I have not the artistic memory. I can only draw what I see before me, and my pictures lack movement." This is a judgment by a shrewd judge that it is unnecessary to try to set aside. As to why he gave up architecture so readily at Rossetti's behest, it was, he told Webb, because he "could not get into close contact with it; it had to be done at second hand."

This seems to mean that, although designing houses was a worthy exercise for the head, it did not offer enough scope for his deft fingers. But there is more in it besides. Even before he quite realised all that irked him about modern civilisation, Morris showed an instinctive rebelliousness against the ever-diminishing ratios in which men were prepared to stand in relation to their new world: their systems of trade and manufacture, their government and their mechanised art. Work done without both complete command of technique and knowledge of and liking for the finished article to be made, seemed to him not only disagreeable, but very wrong—a great menace to the happiness of human beings. He

was shy of giving himself up to any occupation in which the quality and thoroughness of his labour could be conditioned from outside.

During the first year at the Red House the Firm-to-be started building itself up about Morris. The scheme was elaborated in the course of discussions here, and in London at Madox Brown's. Once Morris became keen on it there was no fear of delay in its being put into operation, and before those happy days at Upton came to an end in 1865 the Firm had laid the foundations of a success to which its members had hardly looked forward.

At the Red House Jane bore Morris his two daughters, Jenny in 1861, May in 1862. The birth of the elder was the occasion of one of the many parties given there, of which innumerable cheerful stories are remembered ; the house overflowed with friends, and Swinburne had to sleep on the sofa, and Marshall's bed was made up on the floor.

The hospitality of the Morrises was exactly what the kind of people who availed themselves of it appreciated. Burne-Jones disliked country walks, as they bored and fatigued him, so he was never made to go with the others who did like them. Rossetti was allowed at " Hog's Hole "—as he called the Red House after a neighbouring hamlet—to behave in his usual free-and-easy way. If he wanted to start nibbling at the dessert before the rest had finished their joint, nobody was shocked. Faulkner carried on more as if he had been a preparatory-school boy than an

Oxford don, leaping with loud thumps from the top of the famous settle, and throwing apples at people.

Everybody felt at home. "It was the most beautiful sight in the world to see Morris coming up from the cellar before dinner, beaming with joy, with his hands full of bottles of wine and others tucked under his arms." Jane in a blue silk gown looked like a lovely princess. After dinner, songs; or, on the long evenings, bowls on the lawn for the men. "Oh the joy of those Saturdays to Mondays at Red House!" Most of the guests certainly seem to have been very happy there from the moment they arrived at Abbey Wood Station, to be met by a hatless Topsy with the wagonette, till the same rustic conveyance drew again from its stable—which "had a kind of younger-brother look with regard to the house"—to fetch them away.

Everybody felt at home: possibly even Jane. But what was it this lovely, sad-eyed girl had lost, or had never found, that drew her inward, into the Plutonic twilight in which Gabriel discerned her spirit moving, that drew her away from most of her would-be friends? She was reasonable: were their pranks really tiresome enough to be made responsible for her aloofness? She was also a dreamer. One night she dreamt she found herself alone in the market-place of an unknown town. An old-fashioned coach drove up and stopped near her, and out of it, down some rickety steps, came a little old woman with white

hair ; and she knew this little old woman was Georgie. Then these two greeted one another sorrowfully ; and Jane said : " They are all gone, Georgie," and they wept together.

Who were all gone, one would like to know ? Jane never told Georgie, in the dream or awake. But they *were* gone. An " old-fashioned " coach does sound as if it might have been a symbol of what she lacked—a good old-fashioned household with no frescoes, and not so many disturbing doctrines vented every week-end.

Why had Georgie got white hair ? It would be interesting to know, too, what happened about this time that cooled the friendship between Georgie and Jane.

Lizzie Rossetti died in 1862.

Before the parting with the Red House the little girls had begun to walk and talk. Diary of William Allingham : " Monday, July 18, 1864. The Red House. 7½ a.m. Rose-trellis. Jenny and May, bright-eyed, curly-pated. We hurry to the train. W.M. brusque, careless, with big shoon." Allingham was not one of the people whom Morris either swept off their feet or into a hasty estimate of his character. There is a manly reserve about the *douannier*-poet's staccato jottings. The more significant is the entry in the diary for 1st August 1866. ". . . I like Morris much. He is plain spoken, and emphatic, often boisterously, without an atom of irritating matter." They had by this time known each other for ten years.

Morris was an affectionate father, who doted on his curly-pated daughters, and he was a devoted husband, but this family feeling, joined to the sentiment that impelled him to enrol with the Volunteers in the winter of 1859-60, still hardly turned him into the sort of typical bourgeois whose adventures Leech illustrated in *Punch* week by week.

Morris might have been begotten by the respected head of some thirteenth-century guild wedded to the daughter of a moderate citizen of Utopia : that is the sort of middle class he was. The Victorian bourgeoisie were another stock altogether.

The Red House was an oasis of art and unconventionality in a Sahara of spiritual stuffiness. From the time he got up in the morning (for the most part right early) till the time he tumbled into his stout four-poster, Morris busied himself with jobs that were considered beneath the dignity of an English gentleman. His preoccupation with taste seemed deplorable to his own brothers. More than once his contempt for conventional dress got him the front doors of respectable households slammed in his face by the parlour-maid, who advised the mistress not to admit the wild man without hat or tie ; obviously a suspicious person. He did not go to church on Sundays. He loathed dinner-parties. He even rather resented Ted going to spend the week-end at houses where they kept butlers and did everything (or nothing very much) with the correct middle-class ritual. The

ding-dong politics of the Whigs and Tories bored him to distraction. And when his friends came to the Red House, did they hunt and shoot? Did they solemnly lounge, twirling moustaches and venturing an opinion on the latest play, politely turning over the leaves of a scrap book? Did they listen with furrowed brows while one of their number boomed out the *Times* leader, relapsing into bonhomous Haw-Haws when some one else followed this up with Mr. Punch's latest drollery at the expense of servant-girls?

They behaved quite differently, though all of them except Swinburne were born middle class, upper or lower. Swinburne had been "one of the curiosities of Eton." But Eton was reconciled to her aristocratic curio long before Marlborough began to take an interest in her middle-class renegade of genius.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### I

IN April 1861 the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. started business at 8 Red Lion Square, W.C., as Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture, and the Metals. "Have you heard of the Co.?" wrote Burne-Jones to Crom Price in Russia. "It's made of Topsy, Marshall, Faulkner, Brown, Webb, Rossetti, and me—we are partners and have a manufactory . . . we have many commissions, and shall probably roll in yellow carriages by the time you get back."

Burne-Jones strictly meant this as a little joke. On the whole the partners began with no idea of commercial success. They wanted to provide themselves co-operatively with good works of decorative art, and to cover expenses by selling to an occasional patron. They also wanted to make a gesture. But when Rossetti wrote to Charles Eliot Norton about the Co. he put two exclamation marks in brackets after "a firm to which I belong," as much as to say he realised the thing was mildly absurd. Morris himself at the start hardly hoped for more profits than the least that would justify the time and effort spent on the venture.

The capital they began with was seven £1 shares subscribed, one by each member of the firm, and £100 lent by Mrs. Morris on no security. The Red Lion Square premises consisted of the basement, where a small kiln was installed for firing glass and tiles ; the first floor, office and showroom ; and the third floor, studio. A few men and boys were employed, with George Campfield over them. Campfield, a tiny person, a glass-painter who had been trained at the Working Men's College, grew old in loyal service to the firm. The muscular fellow who did the packing found his way into some of Madox Brown's pictures.

There was no very systematic division of labour. In the main what happened was, the self-effacing Webb designed an extraordinary number of articles of all kinds for domestic purposes ; Brown, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones painted tiles and made cartoons for stained-glass windows ; Faulkner kept the books and laid booby-traps for Morris, and Morris did a good deal of many things.

If possible, the partners met fortnightly. Faulkner described these meetings. " Beginning at 8 or 9 p.m. they open with the relation of anecdotes which have been culled . . . since the last meeting—this store being exhausted, Topsy and Brown will perhaps discuss the relative merits of the art of the thirteenth and fifteenth century, and then perhaps after a few more anecdotes business matters will come up about

10 or 11 o'clock, and be furiously discussed till 12, or 1, or 2."

The arrangement was that each partner should contribute designs for articles as they were wanted, and should get a suitable fee out of the proceeds, Morris receiving £150 a year as general manager and Faulkner the same for keeping the books. When there were profits, they would be shared. But rent and wages had to be paid in the meantime, and it was Morris who provided the money during the lean years—as well as the energy and determination. Gabriel's brother William observed that very soon Morris had come "much the foremost, not only by being constantly on the spot, to work, direct and transact, but also by his abnormal and varied aptitude at all kinds of practical processes."

And of course the inevitable happened. "The works became a small whirlpool of industry that sucked in every one who came near them." The Morris contagion broke out in Bloomsbury and raged. In the top rooms at Red Lion Square was regularly to be found a troop of wives and sisters, the Misses Faulkner and Mrs. Burne-Jones painting tiles, Jane and her sister with several women under them busy at miscellaneous embroideries, and Mrs. Campfield specialising in altar-cloths. A medley of friends contributed designs or advice; Brangwyn, Simeon Solomon, Arthur Moore, William de Morgan—the last of whom in due course became closely associated with the Co.

In the beginning the firm had not omitted to send out a circular about its aims. It was largely composed by Rossetti, pamphleteer of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and it was a document that did not commend itself or its authors much to other firms in the trade. The work of contemporary decorators was referred to as "crude and fragmentary." Properly "artistic supervision" was alleged to be everywhere wanting. Morris himself was not especially modest about the business. He wrote to his old tutor: "You see we are, or consider ourselves to be, the only real artistic firm of the kind."

## II

They began to attract public attention in 1862, when a second Great Exhibition was held, in a gigantic building designed by a captain in the Royal Engineers.

Tennyson did his duty.

"Uplift a thousand voices full and sweet,  
In this wide hall with earth's invention stored,  
And praise th' invisible, universal Lord,  
Who lets once more in peace the nations meet,  
Where Science, Art, and Labour have outpour'd  
Their myriad horns of plenty at our feet.  
O silent father of our Kings to be,  
Mourn'd in this golden hour of jubilee,  
For this, for all, we weep our thanks to thee!"

The nations met in peace in the Cromwell Road, it is true, but that is not to say there had

been no war since they had last come to admire in London the outpourings of Science, Art, and Labour. During the ten years intervening, England, France, Austria, Russia, Turkey, Sardinia, China, Persia, Mexico, and various parts of the British dominions, notably India, had been involved in bloodshed at some time. The bitter civil war in North America was now going on. It looked as if the Prince Consort's optimism had not been well founded, and as if in their eagerness to exchange the products of mine and factory the nations were working themselves into a fretful temper.

The Exhibition plainly showed that the chief progress made by industry since 1851 was towards completer mechanisation, and signs of progress in taste were pretty well overwhelmed by all the horrors in vogue. The Queen was gracious enough to lend for display, among other things, "an Ornament for the centre of the table, representing a covered fountain, designed in the style of the Palace of the Alhambra, executed in gilt, silver-gilt, and enamel; round the base is a group of horses, portraits of favourite animals, the property of Her Majesty; on the lower portion of the base, which is designed to represent a ruin, are introduced the flamingo and vulture, and also various plants, natives of Arabia." Her Majesty herself figured in a great Axminster, on which she was shown receiving a treaty of commerce from Napoleon III. in top boots and with a waxed moustache.

In spite of Redgrave's recommendations after 1851, textile firms still insisted on making carpets with elaborate imitative patterns and floor-cloths printed all over with arabesques giving the effect of being in relief. Materials were worried to death in a thousand cunning ways. But the squiggly vases of Messrs. Emanuel, the steel and marble fireplaces of Messrs. John Thomas, the wrought iron grates with griffins, and piano-candlesticks with butterflies, and bedsteads with doves and amoretti evoked the admiration of a middle class that liked to get its money's worth ; and the nobility and gentry were not astonished at being offered an ornamental shooting lodge of galvanised corrugated iron—"all the comfort of stone or brick building"—a seven-roomed place like an iron pagoda for between £350 and £400.

An example of ingenuity that the members of Morris & Co. must not have appreciated very highly if they saw it was a reversible window, both sides of which could be cleaned from within. They might, however, in this pantechicon, have approved of some of the carriages, of a few pictures, and of one or two busts.

There was a storm in the press and elsewhere over some of Francis Palgrave's criticisms in his *Handbook to the Fine Art Collection*. Palgrave saw how bad Marochetti's sculptures were, and called one of them "this final masterpiece of colossal clumsiness," and he praised Woolner, the friend of the Pre-Raphaelites. "Jacob Omnium" attacked him in the *Times*. Holman Hunt felt

obliged to intervene on the side of Palgrave ; but he was anxious to be fair ; considering Marochetti's portraits he felt bound to admit "there was grace in his statue of Princess Elizabeth, and force in that of Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy." The Pre-Raphaelites themselves came in for some quite shrewd comment from " Clarus," who wrote a *Threepenny Guide to the Exhibition*. Of Millais' " Apple-Blossom " he said that though "the apple-trees seem to branch out of the frames," and "you might put milk into the pan," yet "there is a general want of beauty of arrangement." Clarus might have been interested to learn that the mantle of the Pre-Raphaelites had lately descended on the shoulders of William Morris, who, for all his Gothic proclivities, knew very well that in a work of art the parts must be subordinated to the whole.

There were other storms besides the one raised by Jacob Omnium. After a lecture given at the Society of Arts Mr. George Augustus Sala made a violent onslaught on the designer of the Exhibition buildings. A capable soldier, no doubt, but a poor architect. Why had he ever been commissioned to do the work ? Fellows and visitors took sides, and Lord Granville, who was in the chair, had to use all his diplomacy to restore calm. Then the *Saturday Review* came out with a condemnation of the whole enterprise. What our foreign guests would have learnt, it said, was "how much money can be spent to produce ugliness, inconvenience, danger, and

damage ; and how, by scraping together pennies and wasting pounds, the narrowest illiberality and the greatest thriftlessness can be combined."

A cheerful sign, however, that some members of the jury could kindle to good craftsmanship, even though they did not know brummagem when they saw it, was the award of two gold medals to Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. "Messrs. Morris & Co. have exhibited several pieces of furniture, tapestries, etc., in the style of the Middle Ages. The general forms of the furniture, the arrangement of the tapestry, and the character of the details are satisfactory to the archæologist, from the exactness of the imitation, at the same time that the general effect is most excellent." The second medal was for stained glass : "for artistic qualities of colour and design." No adjudication could have been more vague or amiable.

But there was a slip 'twixt cup and lip. Morris now got his first experience of a common kind of human villainy. The entry into the field of competition by his firm of gentlemanly interlopers aroused the jealousy of certain members of the profession, who determined not to brook resignedly what they were shrewd enough to identify as a threat to their ponderous Italianate cheval glasses, and their beetling and pinnacled sideboards. They petitioned to get the work of Morris & Co. disqualified. It was on the stained glass that they concentrated their attack. They alleged it to be a fraud. They said it was "in reality old glass touched up for the occasion."

The matter was investigated, and the awards were upheld ; one expert roundly declared that the Morris stained glass was the best of its kind at the Exhibition. The public interested itself in the firm's wares to the tune of a hundred and fifty pounds. The architect Bodley gave them some important commissions. So 1862 may be said to have treated them well. It was in the autumn of the same year that Morris began designing his wall-papers.

### III

In this way a move was made at last to bring good craftsmanship back after it had been banished from England by machine production. During the past fifty years nearly all the crafts had gone ; they had stopped paying, because not enough people cared about taste for independent craftsmen to be able to keep their markets in competition with the factories. The craftsmen had been forced into the regiments of labour ; they had gone down into the pit, and England had become a province of Philistia. But now there was the Co. When Crom got home from Russia his friends were not yet rolling in yellow carriages, but they had already made their mark. Notwithstanding the combativeness of their circular and the Exhibition incident, their venture promised to be a significant episode in the history of *peace*—and social progress.

There was this startling aspect of the firm : it offered the spectacle of a number of gentlemen

getting their hands dirty making useful and beautiful things—which they were ready afterwards to sell over the counter.

This behaviour appeared, if one was a right-minded public-school man, vulgarly eccentric; or if one was in the trade, impudent and hateful. There was something about the whole business that savoured of disrespect for the ideals of modern progress—the progress of bigger firms earning bigger profits more quickly from the toil of more and more subordinate workmen, the firms being backed, as occasion demanded, by bigger ironclads hurling bigger shells more speedily at remoter enemies.

And whereas, when Morris rose up (the phrase is not too grandiloquent) useful work had become dreary and devastating for the Proletariat, for the Upper Classes it was taboo; and so were the fine arts—except that a little dabbling in water-colour was permitted to young women. The reasons for this snobbery in which the well-to-do had got tangled up have been analysed by Theodore Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*, a witty book. Veblen explains why handicraft and all creative and necessary work came to be regarded as “ignoble,” while “a base service performed for a person of very high degree may become very honorific; as for instance the office of Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen . . .”; and why the leisure of ladies and gentlemen had always got to be a “non-productive consumption of time.” But Veblen could easily see, being an

American citizen, that economic circumstances from time to time do bring about a readjustment of social values. The pea-nut king comes to think himself the social equal of the landed proprietor descended from William the Bastard, and when days are hard enough, as they have been since Veblen wrote, the children of the landed proprietor are quite willing to sell pea-nuts—if there is still money in the business—let alone go in for interior decoration.

But it was not from economic compulsion that Morris became a decorator, and not simply to try to justify himself that he upheld the honourable nature of craftsmanship. He was actuated by a philosophy of life, which he lived up to sincerely and industriously for many years before he offered it to the world. He believed that "time was when every one that made anything made a work of art besides a useful piece of goods ; and it gave them pleasure to do it." The Mediæval Church had made a fine paradoxical gesture in giving its blessing to poverty. There was nothing paradoxical about the gesture Morris made in rather the same spirit when he declared the work of men's hands blessed. For nobody can ever really want to be destitute, but many people would like work if the conditions were fair, and everybody who does work he likes is happier at work than at leisure.

After overcoming many difficulties the firm did thrive. This was practical idealism. And it is right to stress the idealism, even though this

time the friends were not working from spooniness. From first to last only one man was essential to the firm. That man, as William Rossetti had seen, was Morris ; nevertheless the highly generous methods by which he insisted on the business being conducted were for some years the despair of his managers.

He simply could not be persuaded to charge customers enough.

#### IV

When the Exhibition was over, the Morrises gave a party at the Red House to everybody connected with the firm. This time partners, staff, and associated friends all "entered together," as Rossetti would have put it, "on the Adventure of Hog's Hole."

It is recorded that when they were gathered there, the feeling took possession of them that their host was also their leader. The Movement had become conscious of itself.

Rossetti, a sovereign in his own right, needed no leaders ; but he bore Morris no grudge for his rise to influence. When the crisis came, twelve years later, it was not personal jealousy that put an end to their friendship. In spite of his autocratic ways Morris was sensitively appreciative of the work of those about him, and neither Rossetti nor any one else even suspected him of competing for prestige. The only other at that party who was ever to fall away for good was Marshall ; but he never seems quite to have

belonged, though he was a member of the firm, and they enjoyed his rendering of "The Three Ravens" and "Clerk Saunders" of an evening.

The leadership of Morris was perhaps so acceptable because, besides being a great man, he was a great child. Nobody was ever more innocent of *arrières pensées*. It was easy to get a rise out of him time after time in exactly the same way. He was at the antipodes from that smart candidate for the navy who had remembered the number of his 'bus ticket and was applauded by the examining admirals for being so observant. Morris never remembered nonsensical details; far from being smart, he was clumsy and vulnerable; he was even one of those rare Englishmen who can cry over a disappointment. This thin-skinnedness made his friends solicitous for him, and explains in part how they became wrapped up in him, "as simple people become occupied with children."

The wretchedest thing that happened in the 'sixties was the abandonment of the Red House, made imperative by a combination of circumstances. A plan had been mooted for moving the works from Red Lion Square to Upton, where a convenient piece of ground was available. Morris's idea was that a wing should be added to the Red House for the Burne-Joneses to live in. Then what a Palace of Art there would be! And the daily journey to and from London would be saved; Morris had been finding it very trying.

In September 1864 Morris caught rheumatic

fever while making that journey. The Red House, because it faced north, was difficult to keep properly heated. There was illness in the Burne-Jones family too, and Ted, being badly off, and delicate, and anxious, did not feel he could take the risk of cutting himself off from London. Morris also realised that if the works were moved to Upton the expense of keeping a showroom in London would be greater than he ought to afford.

When Ted's letter arrived with the tidings of his melancholy decision Morris was still in bed. He answered: "As to our Palace of Art, I confess your letter was a blow to me at first, though hardly an unexpected one—in short, I cried; but I have got over it now. As to our being a miserable lot, old chap, speaking for myself I don't know, I refuse to make myself really unhappy for anything short of the loss of friends one can't do without. Suppose in all these troubles you had given us the slip, what the devil should I have done?"

In the end it became clear that there was only one thing for it. The Red House would have to go, and all the work so eagerly put into it be sacrificed; good-bye Webb's bolo turret, and Sir Degrevaunt—who had, however, begun to fade before this, like his cousins at the Oxford Union: good-bye the garden with its rose-trellis and borders of lavender.

Next year the Red House was sold, and in the whole of the rest of his life Morris never set eyes on it again.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### I

LOVE of art appears to take people in nearly as many ways as religion, turning some according to their aptitude into warm lovers of life and of their fellows, while it hastens the evolution of others into beings cold, supercilious, and intolerant. Then there are students of art who behave as if their subject were the corpse of a murdered man, and they criminologists ; art alive and well is nothing to them. But to the mid-nineteenth century middle class the pursuit of art did not seem to deserve even the status that would be due to any professional work of detection. To them art was a kind of extra.

So effectively had Morris lived down his education that he believed that, so far from being an extra, art was a desirable element in all productive work. He associated art with *work* : he did not consider it bound up only with leisure. The middle class felt so strongly that art belonged to idle moments that they could not help arguing there must be something rather idle about the people who produced it ; in fact they doubted whether there was much effort in it, and came to the conclusion that artists ought to be content with the least material reward for their labours—

if such a word could be applied to their nice, easy business of designing. The old cities of Europe would be visited in summer by English paterfamilias, glancing with polite curiosity at the Raphaels and Rubenses, and ready to disinherit the unnatural son who proposed to follow in the footsteps of these eminent men, not so safely dead and buried after all.

Morris's unorthodoxy went farther than belief in the earnestness of art and handicraft. He rejected the middle-class tenet that romance is a mere delightful tickling of one's sense of the magical-mysterious: of the remote, fantastic, and irrelevant. "By romantic," he said, "I mean looking as if there was something going on."

Was romance, then, something *real*, not just a mental flirting with pretty ideas and stories that could not possibly have a serious meaning, nor interfere with one's plain duty in life, which was to make things as cheaply as possible and sell them at the highest price obtainable?

As far as he himself was concerned, Morris had at 26 Queen Square, the firm's new premises, plenty of romance to make up for the loss of the Red House, since things went on there all the time; and as art was mixed up with all of them he ought to have been happy.

He was happy. Fate had suffering in store for him, and there was to be great pathos about the struggles of his later years; but now and always he was, on the whole, in his virile, eager, independent way, a happy man.

So here he was, Morris & Co., craftsman-shopkeeper and the poet of the firm, set up in Queen Square and living over the shop. Lamenting the Palace of Art, it is true, and sad when he thought of the trees and green fields from which he was cut off, he was nevertheless so thankful for his deliverance from the irksome journey up and down that he could, he said, kiss the London pavements. As there was no lawn, he played bowls at the public-house. He strolled about unconcernedly in his workman's blouse, and calling at the Faulkners' was announced by the maid as "Please, m'am, the butcher."

By the time of the move to Queen Square the Morris wall-papers were getting known, and all sorts of articles were being made to order by the firm. Stained glass was still from a money point of view their most important product. Rossetti had given them a good start with some windows he had designed and that were shown at the Exhibition of 1862. They had attracted attention, and Bodley, who already thought well of young Ted Jones's work, then felt it was safe to entrust the firm with windows for churches he was building. There were many of them. At St. Martin's, Scarborough, Rossetti's panels from the Exhibition, illustrating the parable of the Wicked Husbandman, were installed in the east window. Morris figures in this as the accomplice of the man who is dropping a stone on the Lord of the Vineyard's collector. He is "putting his head through a wicket, wearing a smile of hypo-

critical civility." He himself did a St. Paul for the north transept of St. Giles's, Camberwell.

There joined the firm in 1865, in the capacity of business manager, an unusual sort of person : a down-at-heel Etonian. His name was Alphonse Warrington Taylor, and he had tastes for music and objects of art ; his original profession, soldiering, had not suited him ; his last position had been in the box-office at the Haymarket Opera-house. He was obviously the same kind of changeling as Morris, a gentleman without the aptitudes of his class, and with a disreputable hunger for beautiful things. There are more Warrington Taylors nowadays—civilised, gentle, idiosyncratic, charming people ; but not all as competent as he was when he found work he could put his heart into.

He was sympathetic and tactful ; he was shrewd—not that it needed unusual penetration to see what was wrong with the way the firm was being conducted. The two faults that Taylor put his finger on at once were, that Morris never charged enough for the commissions he accepted, and that none of the necessary measures were taken to build up the firm's capital : there was too free-and-easy a distribution of what profits there were, which meant that Morris's loans were going unrepaid, and the drain on his own capital not even stopped yet.

The amazing thing is that for part of the time Taylor, whose health was wretchedly bad—he was a consumptive—had to exercise his control

over the members of the Co. from lodgings in a south coast resort. The lieutenant on whom he relied for help in saving Morris from the effects of his generosity was the equally generous but happily more businesslike Webb. "We couldn't move a step," Taylor wrote to Webb soon after facing the muddle, "without your professional assistance." And Webb, who had begun by distrusting Taylor for something apparently fulsome about him, now took orders from him unquestioningly, and fell in with all his plans: agreed with everything except the proposal that he should ask higher fees for his own designs.

In November 1866 Taylor is writing to Webb: "Before end of month examine P. Cash and see all borrowings are paid back—I know that game too well—sweat Petty Cash and then have it stuck down to private account. . . . See also that Morris does not excessively overdraw his account; he is overdrawn now . . . keep him in hand. . . ." \*

Taylor understood his men. What the firm owed him, a sick man, knowing himself dying, his child dead, his wife difficult (and unfaithful to boot), has perhaps so far not been generally appreciated. That Morris sent him presents of money—he was perfectly poor, and his salary necessarily low—was a mark of affection, evidence of indulgence and solicitude, not proof that the Guv'nor recognised his manager's whole value

\* From a letter in the possession of Sir Sydney Cockerell.

to the firm. And Taylor could be indulgent too. In December the orders to Webb include the following : " I think as Morris has had his health impaired by exposure to climate, overwork, that he ought to have a *douceur*, only not to be considered as due to him, because he has a salary for all superintending, but a *bona fide* *douceur*." \*

Things progressed in 1866, and of course the result was that the more reckless members of the firm tried to get the bit between their teeth. " Please God," wrote Taylor, " I may be alive in April and I will talk the chickatoo language a little to you all." \*

In fact he survived till 1870, and was probably materially speaking, the salvation of Morris.

At 26 Queen Square the painting was done in a long corridor that connected the house with what had been a ballroom and was now the workshop. Morris had his own studio, and it can well be imagined that its atmosphere made a happy impression on his little girls. The youngest one remembers " a place with a big easel, and a large lump of bread with a small hole picked out of the middle, stationed on a chair or somewhere else handy, and the floor strewn with bread-crumbs." And " it all smelt pleasantly of tracing paper." Here Morris went over Rossetti's and Brown's and Burne-Jones's designs for stained glass, making up his mind about the colouring and drawing in the lead lines. Here he analysed tiles that had been specially sent for

\* From a letter in the possession of Sir Sydney Cockerell.

from Holland, as a first step towards improving the quality of his own. Here he composed thousands of lines of the poem that was to make him famous, using copy-books inside each of which was written : " If you find this book bring it to the owner, W. Morris, 26 Queen Square, Bloomsbury, and you shall be rewarded." Here he rampaged when things went wrong, kicking an occasional panel out of the door—a trifle, under the circumstances : hardly a matter to disturb the lady of the house when there was always a staff of cabinetmakers on the premises ready to make good the damage. And here he went on with the work of designing wall-papers that he had started in 1862.

The Morris wall-papers were of a nature to get a wider sale than the firm's stained glass or painted tiles, but being cheap wares did not much pay for some time to come. Even if they had been a gold mine, Morris would not have repudiated the beautiful things he had been making that had a less popular appeal, in the way that Tolstoy turned craftsman would have believed he should ; and though he laid more and more stress on the need for diffusing useful and beautiful articles in common use, he never abandoned the manufacture of objects of a more rarefied value.

The early " Daisy " pattern was the Guenevere of the wall-papers, only more reposeful ; as fresh as spring flowers, and with the clean decision about it that always made a few leaves on a stem by Topsy ten times more alive than a

whole squadron of knights by Ted. As they went on, the wall-papers got more complicated, but never obscure or obtrusive. Morris had an unique talent for stylising natural forms. The vogue for his wall-papers has passed only because the totality of the contemporary visual world has changed too much for them to fit in, for the time being, and not because they have been excelled in their kind. "The fact," he said, "that in this art we are so little helped by beautiful and varying material imposes on us the necessity of being specially thoughtful in our designs ; every one of them must have a distinct idea in it ; some beautiful piece of nature must have pressed itself on our notice so forcibly that we are quite full of it, and can, by submitting ourselves to the rules of art, express our pleasure to others. . . ." So much for natural nature, but Morris has clearly said about the wall-papers that one has got "to accept their mechanical nature frankly." He really had adopted a classical æsthetic, and in understanding of art was head and shoulders higher than the Pre-Raphaelites.

When Morris had perfected his wall-paper technique he made arrangements for the blocks to be cut and the papers to be printed outside Queen Square, so inaugurating a system of collaboration between artist and factory-owner that must have seemed most improper to the die-hard commercial men of whom the trade almost exclusively consisted.

## II

Jane did not have to have wall-papers in all her rooms. The drawing-room was simply painted white, and was perhaps the first white drawing-room in London. Jane moved amid the bustle like a divine embodiment of silent peace, decked in silken gowns that the children loved to stroke—purple silk gowns without the hoops of the period. What a very different person she was from their noisy papa, who let them cling to his hair and then swung round and round as if he was an automatic maypole !

The differences, precisely, between husband and wife allowed their marriage to remain at least an average settled one. If Jane had not been a little delicate, a little unrobust for all her majestic and moonlike loveliness, a little diffident about expressing her own wants and whims ; and if Morris had not been so faithfully guided by a pillar of fire, he would have missed in Jane a consolatory bestirring to praise and encourage him, a movement of the spirit called in German *Bejahung*—be-yes-ing. Jane, a reasonable creature, often tried by her husband's oddities, would wag her finger when he swore too violently or threw half-baked plum-puddings out of the window, and then he was sorry, like a good-natured small boy ; but while she was still smiling over his delinquency he was walking with heroes in the white sunshine of Argolis.

In the kind of society that formed itself round

Topsy, Jane ran no risk of snubs. Topsy was never too busy to look after her, and when her health seemed to require it, exiled himself to vacuous watering-places, like Bad Ems, a delightful enough spot, he admitted, "if I had any business there."

Visitors and new friends never failed to be amazed by her beauty. "Oh, *ma chère*," wrote Henry James after going to Queen Square in 1869, "such a wife! *Je n'en reviens pas*—she haunts me still. A figure cut out of a missal—out of one of Rossetti's or Hunt's pictures—to say this gives but a faint account of her, because when such an image puts on flesh and blood, it is an apparition of fearful and wonderful intensity." On this occasion poor Jane, with her "thin pale face" and "dark Swinburnian eyes" had a toothache.

After dinner she lay on the sofa with a handkerchief to her face, and Morris read aloud an unpublished poem from the second part of "his un-Earthly Paradise." "There was," says James, "something very quaint and remote from our actual life, it seemed to me, in the whole scene: Morris reading in his flowing antique numbers a legend of prodigies and terrors (the story of Bellerophon it was), around us all the picturesque bric-à-brac of the apartment . . . and in the corner this dark, silent, mediæval woman with her mediæval toothache."

Morris he found "extremely pleasant. . . . He impressed me most agreeably. . . . He has a

very loud voice and a perfectly unaffected and business-like address. His talk indeed is wonderfully to the point, and remarkable for clear good sense. He said no one thing that I remember, but I was struck with the very good judgment shown in everything he uttered."

### III

Morris, to whom romance was "something going on," reckoned the lives and deaths of heroes on as high a plane of reality as the fets and fashions of modern people, whose claims to superiority, based on their possession of gas laid on and lavatories connected with the municipal drains he flatly disallowed. The year 1867 had seen the publication of *Jason*, which had at first been meant to be part of *The Earthly Paradise*, but was then issued separately owing to the length to which it had grown. *Jason*, for all the antiquity of the subject, was exciting enough to have a large sale. This book made Morris famous. It was noticed that although here was an antique theme treated in the mediæval manner of Chaucer the general effect was modern, except that the sentiment had not, as some of the reviewers remarked, quite modern religion and morality about it. "Would that I," exclaimed the poet,

"Had but some portion of that mastery  
That from the rose-hung lanes of woody Kent  
Through these five hundred years such songs has sent  
To us, who, meshed within this smoky net  
Of unrejoicing labour, love them yet."

Swinburne did not doubt that wish had been granted. He wrote: "In all the noble roll of our poets there has been since Chaucer no second teller of tales, no rhapsode comparable to the first, till the advent of this one." The other critics who mattered added their praise in accents of similar conviction; the public, perhaps rather unaccountably, responded; and Morris cheered up: "Last week I had made up my mind that I shouldn't be able to publish *The Earthly Paradise*, and was very low"; now he was "in good spirits after the puffs."

And yet, in spite of Swinburne and the others, in spite of the public judgment of 1867-68, a certain independent-minded critic thirty years later wrote down *Jason* as mild—bathos after *Guenevere*. Dixon Scott was just in his arrangement of Morris's chief poetical works in order of merit; and he was so nearly just—for all the overstatement rising out of his too dashing sincerity—in his diagnosis of the moods in which they were composed, that his misconception of Morris's whole mission, character, and genius seems almost as much a pity as a shame.

*Jason* was mild, because the author of *Guenevere* was no longer tormented by Palomides complexes, or by doubts about what career he ought to follow; *Jason* was suave, because Morris had acquired an almost classical sentiment about art—only he stressed the need for the producer being in a happy state of mind instead of, like the classical artist, putting the consumer first,

and seeming to be above all anxious to hurt no one's feelings, however gruesome his subject. (Where is death's sting in a "Crucifixion" by Raphael?)

But if *Jason*, looked at as a piece of classicism rather than fallen Gothic, is still not a supreme achievement, and even if the responsibility for its mildness can be laid at the door of 26 Queen Square, it is hard that Morris should be alleged to have been doing nothing more in his workshop than soothe his nerves with the practice of "a jovial materialism." Here is the point at which Dixon Scott goes astray. He condemns the adult humanist for being no longer an intuitive boy aching with the growing pains of a particularly uneasy adolescence. Living himself in a whirl of eagerness, he wanted from his poet higher and higher ecstasies alternating with deeper and deeper prostrations of spirits. He could think of Morris only as either temperamental or null; he was rather unforgiving—though he praised *Sigurd*, it was with the detached air of some one who has not really quite got over being badly let down in the past. In his disappointment with Morris the poet he denigrates Morris the seer. Morris the lover of his kind he neglects altogether; and he ends with a laugh at Morris the craftsman—such a shrill, hysterical laugh! Such a spiteful little laugh!

One feels that Dixon Scott was too good to have given way to his temper so over *Jason*, and *Jason* is certainly not bad enough by a half

to have provoked such wrath. *Jason* is more indeed than an unhappy *tour de force* of poetical continence. It is a human, rather wistful epic of :

“ short love and long decay,  
Sorrow that bides and joy that fleets away.”

It is the most plain, unaffected of Morris's works. It is remarkable for the strong way it suggests the eternal in human nature persisting through the superficial changes between one age and another : the spirit of man does not have to be shown always tricked out in the latest fashion—as if the passengers in the *Great Eastern* were necessarily more capable than the Argonauts of loving and hating, suffering and being happy, in proportion as their craft was the bigger and faster. Jason himself has a touch of Everyman, and at times, when he is perplexed, his eyes wrinkle up with a look of *Mister Everyman*. Medea has the prouder step ; it is her heart that palpitates with the poet's sensibilities.

Then *Jason* contains the irreproachable song sung by the nymph to Hylas, haunting and beautiful beyond words. This is not lulling us by mere music ; there is nothing too bodily or “ unsparingly optical ” in the account, and it is hardly a terrestrial garden close—

“ For which I cry both day and night,  
For which I let slip all delight,  
That maketh me both deaf and blind,  
Careless to win, unskilled to find,  
And quick to lose what all men seek.”

The soul has spread its wings.

“ Yet tottering as I am, and weak,  
Still have I left a little breath  
To seek within the jaws of death  
An entrance to that happy place,  
To seek the unforgotten face  
Once seen, once kissed, once reft from me  
Anigh the murmuring of the sea.”

#### IV

So *Jason* was a success, and by end of 1867, Warington Taylor felt he could go so far as to say that the firm's affairs were “ consolatory.”

About £3000 of work had been done in the year, £2300 of it stained-glass windows. Rossetti had been asking for details, and Taylor wrote and said that in his opinion the 28 per cent. profit was not enough. “ Morris and I,” he went on, “ never get hot with one another save on the subject of price. He is always for a low price : seeing the amount we do, it is absurd : we must have the long price. . . .” In 1866 the profits had been £500 ; Taylor thought they ought to have made that on stained glass alone. Of the £500 Morris got £150, and Taylor himself £120. It was a hard struggle. There had been some redecorations at St. James's Palace, mainly designed by Webb, who was “ miserably paid ”—not the firm's fault, for “ he would not have more.”

The great commission of 1867 was the Green Dining-Room at the Victoria and Albert Museum, their first important piece of secular decoration. Webb and Burne-Jones collaborated with Morris

over it, and a number of painters were employed to paint the panels. When the job was finished Morris was not satisfied ; it seemed to him that the painters had not quite made their several sections match, so he called on Fairfax Murray to do them all over again single-handed.

Taylor had nothing against this kind of conscientiousness ; if only he could persuade Morris to charge enough, though ! Next year, in answer to more questions by Rossetti, he says : " Morris always charges too low ; he does not like, naturally enough, to be thought greedy and avaricious, and consequently, if he makes a contract by himself, charges invariably too low." Rossetti had evidently been inquiring about a sum of £700 which Taylor had ear-marked for Morris in the accounts. There was nothing very definite on paper about the repayment to Morris of all the money he had advanced to the firm in the course of seven years, whereas by the original agreement Rossetti was undoubtedly entitled to receive his equal seventh part share of what was much too vaguely called profits. Taylor now had the awkward duty to perform of deciding fairly what was profits that might be divided among the seven partners, and what was interest and capital owing to Morris. " Although personal riches may not be of advantage to Morris, this £700," said Taylor firmly, " is an absolute debt due to him by the Company."

He was prepared to admit to Rossetti that Morris had other difficult ways besides charging

too little. He "is very nervous about work; and he consequently often suddenly takes men off jobs and puts them on another. There is in this great loss of time. . . ."

In fact, though progress was henceforward made, slowly at first, and faster after the situation had been cleared up in 1874 (at great expense to Morris), the Company only became a really flourishing concern when Morris had been drawn into politics, and for the time being left the business side to Wardle, who was appointed manager after Taylor's death in 1870.

Without wishing to insinuate that Warrington Taylor in any way underrated Morris—indeed, he regarded the Guv'nor as the Michelangelo of his day—one may claim that it never occurred to Morris to worry about whether any one would think him "greedy and avaricious," because he was not and never could be either of those things. Wilfred Heely saw the truth. Heely returned to England in 1869, after some years abroad, and examining his old friends with the eye of detachment, came to the conclusion that only Ted and Topsy had not "given in to the world."

Morris had not given in, nor become greedy or worldly. Living down his education had strengthened him against that curious moral dualism that good-natured young men of the upper classes were brought up to accept as the natural thing. On the one hand, the self-denying principles of Christianity—"Sell all thou hast," "Love thine enemies"—on the other hand, the

code of an acquisitive society : once these antitheses have been taken as somehow compatible, logic is weakened, and the young citizens are left rather an easy prey to paradox, and casuistry, and all kinds of inconsistent propaganda. Without being a Christian, Morris was a good and honest man, and though it was no part of his faith that he ought to sell all he had, he would have thought it very wrong to be greedy, if it had ever entered his head to overcharge his customers ; but that it never *did* enter his head every circumstance of his career bears witness.

There was a second ingredient in education, besides the paradoxical, that had not agreed with Morris.

The lack of equilibrium in the world of Western civilisation must in part be due to the emphasis education lays on conspicuous success. The kind of good life that is held up to youth for a criterion is not so much the full and contented life as the life in which records are broken, and even when the success of very benevolent and useful men is described it is their triumph rather than the satisfaction they must have got in the process of devoting themselves to art, or science, or philanthropy, that is made most of.

Though Ruskin may be allowed the credit for teaching Morris to beware of perfections, it is clear that Morris as a boy was already rather interested in the richness and beauty of the natural world, and the potential fulness of human life, and not so much enthusiastic over the

crystallisation of effort into the various forms of eminent success. He came to care even less for what is represented by the king—the king, poised with crown and sceptre above and outside the world, complete, infallible, exhausted—and to care more and more for the peasant, whose normal, rhythmical sowing and reaping, sowing and reaping, is the very beating heart of humanity; and for the potter, and weaver, and carpenter, who constantly renew life by their unsensational toil, and never make things perfect and finished once and for all.

A world of peasants and craftsmen might be good, but a world of kings was impossible—unless the kings were peasants and craftsmen too. The pleasant vision of a world of this kind is shown in the opening lines of *Sigurd the Volsung*, which came after *The Earthly Paradise*, and was the last of Morris's epic poems.

“ There was a dwelling of Kings ere the world was waxen old,  
Dukes were the door-wards there, and the roofs were  
thatched with gold,  
Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed  
the doors;  
Earls' wives were the weaving women, queens' daughters  
strewed the floors.”

An interesting vision—and how far removed from actuality! And why so far removed? Because teaching the virtue of conspicuous success lessens sympathy with the people who do the primitive, ordinary things necessary for the support of life. When there is little or none of

this sympathy left, the upper classes find it not at all peculiar or uncomfortable to earn their livings in positions where they are cut off from knowledge of how these simple things are done—in so far as machinery has not transformed the process—and from the simple people—such as are left—who do them.

In the modern world, in those countries where conformity is not imposed by dictators (a tyranny, neither new nor helpful, that makes the heart sick and the conscience revolt), we find a passion for abnormality at which the imagination boggles. Any abnormality rather than ordinairiness. Abnormal villainy; abnormal vice; or anything abnormal, like getting married in an aeroplane, or writing to the police accusing oneself of a crime one did not commit. Researches research into abnormality; the public-spirited band together in defence of abnormal children, and of the sexually abnormal, and of people suffering from every sort of perversion and inversion; and only a barbarian could fail to see that all this concern with abnormality is very good and blessed.

But what about normality? Who is there left to puzzle his head over the question: How ought a man to live? If people only knew how to be normal, and there was any prestige in it, might not a good deal of trouble be saved: trouble and pain and banding together? Science may cure; cannot wisdom prevent? Better if it could; even though that would mean some of

the kind-hearted experts in abnormality losing their jobs, and being very sad and bored, with perhaps nobody's business to mind but their own.

Morris is our great modern British apostle of normality—and of having one's own business to mind. No one was ever more humanly discontented, and no great man was ever great so much in his own despite. What Morris sought was contentment, and an ideal ordinariness or normality of life, and he found no help in the ten tables of Victorian convention, nor much in the latest developments of science, for, as he succinctly put it, "it is every man's duty to know what he is, and not to think of the embryo he was, nor of the skeleton that he shall be." What Morris sought was equilibrium, some way of gratefully living life while it lasted and until death stalked in; and as he was a moralist and a prophet, who had the good of his fellow-men at heart, he also wanted to let live.

## V

His own way in the middle years was to make useful and beautiful things: that was his work—and to write poetry: that was his worship. He would have thought it as wrong-headed (for himself) to live by poetry alone as by prayer and meditation alone, hence his saying that "if a chap can't compose an epic poem while he's weaving tapestry he had better shut up, he'll never do any good at all."

Morris did not mean the whole of that. He did not think he was as good a poet as Swinburne, who devoted his life to the art—though he did not much care for Swinburne's manner. But in writing *The Earthly Paradise*, which was his praise of nature, of life, and love, and beauty, he believed he ought hardly to be more self-conscious, or to feel he was doing anything more out-of-the-way, than a man does who goes to church regularly, as a plain matter of duty, to praise God. And by a related analogy, just as formal church-going is tedious to many people, in spite of the grand and well-sustained language of Bible and Prayer Book, so *Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise* would fail to hold their less patient readers if the stories they told were not such exciting ones.

In church we cannot expect the adventure of Joseph and his Brethren, or another as good, every fortnight, but in *The Earthly Paradise* there are twenty-four stories, taken by Morris from the mythologies of Greece, and the North, and the Orient, with twenty-four of the most exciting plots in the world. The first is about Atalanta, the last about that mediæval knight, ill-fated but after all not damned, who lived for a time at the court of Venus, and is best known as Tannhäuser. These and the rest Morris treated with an exhaustless fertility of invention; and with a skilled adaptation of texture to scale, a composure of design, that suggests, precisely, the craft of a man weaving tapestry. The bounding incident

is set against a background of not less lively nature ; and then, just when the sun has been shining most gaily, in the ears of lovers clasped at long last in one another's arms, sounds the refrain—with more than mediæval, with classical ominousness and melancholy—*timor mortis con-turbat me* ; and the sky clouds over.

“ O fools, and if you could but know  
How fair a world to you is given ! ”

One could try to teach them ; Morris tried ; it was the first and chief premises of his philosophy. Life is the great gift, though so many people are not thankful for it, and others expect the servants of their pride and policy to throw theirs away lightly—peasants, and workmen, and schoolboys, whom they have persuaded that it is more “ glorious ” to die than to live. Well, if death is to be thought of as a gift too, it can only be because the world is wicked ; it is a gift to them who use the gift of life sinfully, and to the victims they have ruined ; and is sent, perhaps,

“ That envy, hatred, and hot love,  
Knowledge with hunger by his side,  
And avarice and deadly pride,  
There may have end like everything.”

Like everything ; there's the rub ; not only the vicious and the corrupt, but the maids “ straight and fair of face,” and the men “ stout for husbandry.” This is not quite

the mood of "Gather ye rosebuds while you may":

"Weep, O Love, the days that flit  
Now, while I can feel thy breath,  
Then may I remember it,  
Sad and old and near my death.  
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth  
What thing cometh after death?"

Far away in Russia, Tolstoy was afflicted with the same anguish at the thought of man's mortality. In *Anna Karenina*, Levin also turns for relief, and in hopes of learning some deep secret of comfort, first, to love: in case by tracing it to its source in the heart he may gain a view of the fountain-head of eternal being—the two cannot lie far apart; and then to the order of nature: the seasons in field and forest, and the humble people in most direct dependence on them, living in harmony with the grand yearly movement of sleep and reawakening, triumph and decline; here, if anywhere, transmitted down the ages by the genius of the plough, perpetuated in the rustle of the wind through the ears of corn, here must the truth be sought.

In *The Earthly Paradise*, as in Tolstoy's two great novels, one seems from time to time to be brought to the threshold of illumination; only a very fine film of blindness is left between the eyes and vision; but neither author presumes to think, dares to pretend, that he knows what he cannot feel distinctly enough to communicate.

They give it up.

"Death have we hated, knowing not what it meant,  
Life have we loved through green leaf and through sere,  
Though still the less we knew of its intent. . . ."

Morris was impressed, like Levin, by the queer confidence with which, in the midst of death, life goes on. Around him of course all was bustle and activity. The curly-pated ones were growing up pretty and clever, and he himself, somehow, was going from strength to strength. He let the children scramble themselves into numerous accomplishments. He said: "Children bring each other up." He was sorry for children whose parents made educational experiments with them.

The firm's finances were now in a better state, owing to the hard work of all kinds that was being done: for instance, Morris did not disdain mere upholstering. Then in 1870, much to the sorrow of the friends he had served so well, Warrington Taylor died.

When Morris was going through his papers, he found the estimates his late manager had made out for the decoration of a certain church. This commission had in the end not been given to the Co. Morris had been a little surprised at the time, as the Vicar at the church was a friend of his; but he had forgotten all about the business. Now the explanation came to light. Under the item: "To providing a silk and gold altar-cloth" Taylor had written: "*Note.*—In

consideration of the fact that the above item is a wholly unnecessary and inexcusable extravagance at a time when thousands of poor people in this so-called Christian country are in want of food—additional charge to that set forth above, ten pounds.”

Morris had been delighted. Years later he said to Bruce Glasier : “ You see, I had succeeded in making the dear old chap something of a Socialist after all ! ” This is a little strong, of course, as Morris was then no more than “ something of ” a Socialist himself ; but no doubt the unsnobbish, human, compassionate side both he and Taylor had to their natures was as much a bond between them as their interest in art.

George Wardle succeeded Taylor, and was manager for twenty years.

About this time Morris had started illumination ; he was deep in Icelandic ; he had resigned his directorship of Devon Great Consols—and with much satisfaction had sat on his first and last top hat. He disliked the theatre more than ever. Allingham took him to see *Black-eyed Susan*, which bored him horribly. He still had no use for parties, though he was happy in gatherings of men he knew, among whom he could discuss art and life, and troll out ridiculous songs like “ There’s a louse on my back twenty years old,” which he had heard from Allingham, who was indebted for it to the Poet Laureate.

Jane and the children would now and again go off and stay in the country with old Mrs.

Morris. Morris would join them for the week-end when he could get away, and then on Sunday read prayers to the household as his father had done before him. Afterwards his mother would sigh, and—a little prejudice still contending with pride—say to Jane : “ Why, my dear, he might have been a bishop by now ! ”

## CHAPTER NINE

### I

" . . . A bishop by now."

A little reflection on Morris's extraordinary energies of body and mind leads one to wonder what would have happened to him if genius had not been another of his birthday presents. It is of course conceivable that he might have become a bishop. But it seems unlikely; he was too restless, too empirical—and not very tactful: perhaps even if he had wanted to become a bishop the Prime Minister would have had to summon up courage to thwart him. More probably he would have devoted his powers to business, a wider field than the ecclesiastical, and never so rich and rewarding as in his young days. Then he would have been an enthusiast, instead of a sceptic, about machinery; have harnessed men instead of setting them free; and have given society an extra fraction of impetus towards the abyss of hates and conflicts that was still hidden from all people, except a few prophets, by the mists ahead.

He certainly had traits in common with big business men. He usually got up early in the morning, while the rest of the household was asleep, and worked. He was masterful. He

wanted his own way, and only treated his employees as equals, and invited their criticisms because he *was* Morris, and a man of genius. He was tirelessly productive—in his special case “creative” is, however, the juster word.

A bishop : no. Many bishops are busy men, but where is the diocese that would have absorbed the energies of the ten men that Morris was ? Many bishops are good men, holy men, but while the Reverend William Morris was still a curate the Archbishop of Canterbury would have got disquieting reports of his literal interpretations of portions of the Gospel, and the Reverend would never have become the Right Reverend

The real Morris, though not a Christian, and not even sure of believing in God, was religious by any reasonably liberal definition of the word. He had the natural piety of people who seek for spiritual truths. He was as much a seeker as physicists are, who, when they have resolved the cosmos into elemental fire, or water, or geometrical principles, are comforted ; but Morris’s researches were pursued in the sphere of human values, where faith and the conventions were generally supposed—during the Victorian era—to have made such investigations unnecessary.

How ought a man to live ? No answer was going to satisfy Morris that he could not understand with his heart as well as his head. Gradually his faith made itself known and intelligible to him, by a process the opposite from conversion. Then, when he had at last confidently given

himself to the service of his fellow men, he touched the zenith of his rare, human excellence. This is usually acknowledged even by those who feel they cannot sympathise with the politics of his later years.

And not only did the accepted faith not hold him, but the conventions of his class seemed to him to hide, not to reveal, what he wanted to find out about mankind. Mythology he loved, of course, for its own sake—that is for its good stories ; but in his growing preoccupation with the Northern myths, which deal so much with the raw passions and poignant dreams of primitive folk, there was an instinctive psycho-analytic motive as well. Then the plot thickened still further. As he got deeper into the subject his rôle changed. He changed. He was no longer a poet who was interested in the story of Sigurd, because it was a good story ; he was no longer a psychologist, finding in the story of Sigurd a key to the complexities of modern life. For a time, he was Sigurd.

## II

In 1868 Morris had been introduced by Warington Taylor to the Icelandic scholar, Eiríkr Magnússon. He had known some of the Sagas at second hand before this time, and had adapted three Northern tales from English and French versions for *The Earthly Paradise*. Now he plunged into learning Icelandic. Unfortunately there were no grammars available. “ You be my

grammar as we go along," he said in his large way to Magnusson; and so well *did* they get along that he was able to take "The Lovers of Gudrun" direct from Laxdaela Saga.

For a few years Iceland and its literature seemed to his friends to be an almost unaccountable obsession with him. He went out to the country twice, and would have liked to visit for a third time its wind-swept hills and treeless heaths. Up to a point, of course, his admiration for the Sagas did not need explaining—occurring in that Gothic breast. But the Sagas are not like Chaucer. Morris loved Chaucer for his *gemüthlichkeit*, the sedate, smiling, secure mediævalism of clustering red roofs, and gay caparisons, and good apprentices; and cathedrals going up under the hands of contented, anonymous masons, and the devil at the end of a chain, with as much licence as was good for not-so-suffering humanity.

But the Sagas are not like that. They are not comfortable. They have the alarming, relentless, maniacal quality that psycho-analysis reveals in the unconscious mind of the individual.

Morris claimed for Volsunga Saga that it was "the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks." He did his best for the cause by making translations with Magnusson's help; also by writing *Sigurd*. Richard Wagner did his best, too, with results better and worse; since, though for one who has read *Sigurd* there are a hundred who have seen *Siegfried*, Sigurd keeps his in-

tegrity, but Siegfried is remembered as anything but a figure starkly Icelandic. Morris himself thought it was "nothing short of desecration to bring such a tremendous and world-wide subject under the gas-lights of an opera, the most rococo and degraded form of art—the idea" (idiomatically used in the Victorian way to convey great indignation) "of a sandy-haired German tenor tweedle-deeing over the unspeakable woes of Sigurd, which even the simplest words are not typical enough to express."

It is clear from Morris's phrasing of this outburst that Volsunga Saga meant more to him than the story it tells. If the subject is "world-wide," and not merely what happened to a few legendary persons of the ancient North, it would be because their adventures stand for something with a bearing on our common humanity; and that is what seems to be implied when he writes that "typical" words are needed to express the woes of Sigurd.

Morris in his teens had already known that men's motives were not always what they pretended, and his conviction had not ceased to grow that civilisation, which had begun as an art, was degenerating into a racket. The expansion of trade had filled the world with objects painful to make and unnecessary to the user. What was all the fuss of production really about? In 1870 there were, it is true, fewer gadgets than there are to-day; but also fewer sceptics.

Psychology has in the meantime been the most

drastic lance for the great blister of man's pride. And though Morris undoubtedly turned to the Sagas, with their primitive cruelties and virtues, as some men go to the mountains to be away from the stinks and bewilderment of towns—that is, for refreshment—he also expected to find out something from them about our hidden springs of action: what our magnificent claims amount to, stripped of make-believe, and on what real passions the organised chaos of society is sustained.

Before he set out on the first journey to Iceland something else important had happened. He had taken a lease of Kelmscott Manor, near Lechlade, the piece of earth for which he was to love the whole world the more, and his *Home*.

Morris had never become resigned to living in London. His outpourings about nature in *The Earthly Paradise* had left him dry, and thirsty for the country. If a suitable country place could be found it was decided to take it, with Rossetti sharing; Rossetti had been ill, and needed a change, and clean air to breathe. Then Kelmscott Manor was advertised by a London house-agent in the spring of 1871, and found charming; Rossetti agreed that it was a haunt of ancient peace, and, what was as much to the point, Webb reported that the walls were sound.

Rossetti, by now a drug addict, went straight down at the beginning of July, and Morris went too to install Jane and the children before leaving, on the 6th, for Iceland.



*[Reproduced by courtesy of Messrs Braun & Co*

JANE MORRIS AS PROSERPINE  
BY ROSSETTI

His companions were to be Faulkner, Magnusson, and a Mr. Evans, who wanted to get some shooting: he was a sportsman who held a commission in the Dorset Yeomanry. Morris had been in a great state of excitement for weeks already—riding to strengthen his muscles, and practising cooking over camp-fires with the eagerness of a schoolboy. The night in the train from London to Granton he was too agitated to sleep.

They sailed in the *Diana*, 240 tons, and five days later came in sight of Iceland. Poor Charlie Faulkner had been very sea-sick.

News of Morris's visit having got about, it is not surprising to learn that the Icelanders were "tickled at an Englishman coming out, not to shoot their moors and fish their rivers, but to make pilgrimage to the homes of Gunnar and Njal, to muse on the Hill of Laws. . . ." A remarkably quaint event—this foreigner, Mr. Morris, of Messrs Morris, Decorators, who wrote poetry for a "sub-trade" (as Henry James put it), standing on the deck of the little Danish gunboat as it approached Hjørleif's Head, gazing through the grey morning with the emotions of a Crusader before Jerusalem.

He was not too moved to take in very exact impressions, which he later transferred to his diary. "On our left was a dark brown ragged rocky island, Papey, and many small skerries about it, and beyond that we saw the mainland, a terrible shore indeed: a great mass of dark

grey mountains worked into pyramids and shelves, looking as if they had been built and half ruined ; they were striped with snow high up. . . .”

The arrival of the peculiar Englishman was mentioned in the Icelandic press : Rossetti wrote to W. B. Scott from Kelmescott at the beginning of August : “ We heard the other day of Top, from the unpronounceable capital of Iceland. Of course his peregrinations and much-endurings had not yet commenced. An Icelandic paper was also sent, in which his arrival was recorded as ‘ Wm. Morris, skald.’ ” This title afforded Rossetti the hugest amusement. “ He really ought to go by no other name for the future, and ‘ the Bard ’ be relegated to Swinburne.”

The party spent a few days at Reykjavik, and then the “ much-endurings ” started, Faulkner being the one to feel the strain after about a week of them. He was ill enough to keep the party camped for four days near some pools of boiling water that Morris found intolerably uncanny, so Evans and Magnusson, availing themselves of nature’s cauldrons, for once cooked the dinner.

By the famous geysers Morris did not at all want to stop : to break his neck in his quality of “ pilgrim to the holy places of Iceland ” he was prepared, but not “ to wake up boiled while one was acting the part of accomplice to Mangnall’s Questions.”

He said : “ Let’s go home to Haukadal ; we can’t camp in this beastly place.”

“What is he saying?” said Eyvindr, the first guide, to Gisli, the second guide.

“Why, I’m not going to camp here,” said Morris.

“You must,” said Eyvindr, “all Englishmen do.”

“Blast all Englishmen!” said Morris.

But Evans, “who behaved like a lamb on this occasion” (that is, with English reasonableness), effected a compromise, and they camped out of sight, though not out of sound, of the big geyser; and what with beef, chocolate, and grog, Morris was soon in a good temper, in spite of apprehensions of “a new geyser bursting out just under our tent in honour of my arrival.”

Morris kept a detailed diary of the journey, which was planned to take in as many as possible of the places where deeds celebrated in the Sagas had been done. They travelled with a train of about forty horses, carrying with them at the start a thousand silver dollars in sacks. They saw Bergthorsknoll, the home of Njal, where they slept in the home-field; Gunnar’s hall and the house where Grettir was born; and the place from which they saw the “terrible inky mountains tossing about” was half-an-hour’s ride from where Gudrun died. Towards the end of the journey, after passing the Fairwood-fells and Grettir’s lair—“a savage and dreadful place”—they came to Reykholt, the home of the great Snorri Sturluson, most famous of all skalds, and then made for Reykjavik again by way of the Hill of Laws. Morris wrote of it: “Surely ’tis

one of the most dramatic spots in all Iceland, and Grim Goatshoe, who picked it out for the seat of the Althing (he had a penny for his pains from every householder in Iceland) must have been a man of high poetic insight."

Morris found the people of the country congenial ; they were a simple and hardy race, with a polity that had long been stabilised at a level that appealed to him ; they all seemed to know their history, they weaved with the sort of loom the Greeks had used more than two thousand years ago, they had a kind welcome for strangers.

The party met Icelanders of all conditions, from Jon Sigurdson, himself an editor of the Sagas, and President of the Althing—which since Grim Goatshoe's day had only once, for a period of forty-four years out of more than a thousand, been in abeyance—to the humble bonder near Lithend, who kept such a straight face when Morris fell off his pony, merely observing to Magnusson : " The skald is not quite used to riding them." They received friendly treatment everywhere. Rossetti reported to Scott that " Faulkner and Magnusson, at one hospitable mansion which they visited, had their breeches deferentially removed by the lady of the house on retiring to refresh themselves and prepare for dinner . . ." but something in Morris's eye, a gleam of *sauvagerie*, appears to have made her realise in time that he was too rude a carle to appreciate such refinements of good manners.

The journey lasted from Reykjavik and back

again, forty days. In that time the Devil tried vainly to gain Morris's ear, to tempt him. He would of course have offered him no dreams of worldly dominion, nor even three acres and a cow in physical Iceland, but—very cunning for the harmlessness and feasibility of the thing—a *spiritual* home here, to which he could retire even while his hands were working wall-paper designs in Bloomsbury. Might he not have been prevailed on to lay up his treasure in a land that meant so much to him, as scholars and poets more often lay up theirs in Hellas?—and been content to let the modern world go by? He was disgusted enough by it. Now that he was getting familiar with the topographical background of the Sagas—the local colour and customs of Iceland—might he not have been seduced into antiquarianism once and for all?

The reasons were clearer later on why the clever devil got no audience. . . .

Morris had from the outset been living at such a high pitch of eagerness, that it is no wonder he had a reaction in the course of the journey. It came on him about half-way, in Laxdaela; the party had had a long spell of riding against the wind, and suddenly, what with one thing and another, his spirits fell very low. "Just think," says the diary, "what a mournful place this is—Iceland, I mean . . . how every place and name marks the death of its short-lived eagerness and glory: and withal so little is the life changed in some ways. . . ."

That must have been one of the occasions when he thought most tenderly of "the sweet, fresh garden at Kelmscott," though he hardly knew it yet, and of Jane and the little girls. "Tell them," he wrote to Jane, "that I am going to try to bring them my pretty grey pony home." He meant Falcon, but Falcon had to be sold, and it was Mousie that became one of the celebrities of Lechlade.

On the 8th September Morris was back in London, "well washed, and finding nobody I cared for dead: a piece of luck that does not always happen to people when they are fools enough to go away beyond recall for more than two months.

"This is not meant in disrespect to Iceland, which is a marvellous, beautiful, and solemn place, and where I had been in fact very happy."

## CHAPTER TEN

### I

MEANWHILE at Kelmscott Jane and the little girls were settling down, and with them was Rossetti, not much more prosperous now than in the days when Ruskin had dictated to him that he was to paint his trees to look like trees ; and not very happy, and not very well.

The impression he made was of being a solitary creature. He was given to brooding ; he had become over-sensitive, and had not the knack of throwing off his troubles, real or imaginary. Though he enjoyed the peace of Kelmscott he was as urban as Burne-Jones, and went for walks as a duty, not a pleasure. Sometimes he went alone, sometimes Jane or the children went with him.

He usually began the day by breakfasting off a large number of eggs, after which he would settle down to work, often going without lunch. He was painting Jane as Proserpine ; May also came into a picture—*La Ghirlandata*—twice over as angels' heads. His manner with the children was characteristic of all that had been delightful and unaffected about the old Gabriel. He talked to them without the patronising airs of the conventional grown-up, taking them quite seriously, "asking questions and really

seeming to listen to what one answered." He asked May, for instance, which of two ladies they both knew she thought the uglier. May considered, and then gave her opinion, and "with equal gravity he said, 'I think you are right!'" May reported the whole conversation to her mamma, who said: "It was very, very naughty of Mr. Rossetti."

Jane was, of all the ladies Rossetti knew—after Lizzie had gone—the one he thought most beautiful and worth painting. It is a point no one is likely to miss: Morris, in leaving his wife under the same roof as the admiring and admired Gabriel, while he was himself a thousand miles away in Iceland, was acting with a liberality that other people besides members of the Victorian middle class would have thought, for one reason or another, ill-judged. It is a point no one ought to miss, because it is quite as important as Morris's wall-papers. Rossetti knew it is wrong to treat children as if they were perfectly childish, and Morris took it for granted that the part of a sensible man is neither to treat men and women as if they were imperfectly grown-up, nor to set out to regulate their private behaviour for them. What chance would the Devil on Snaefellness have had against some one—the apologist of Guenevere—whom it was impossible to make jealous? The Devil's easiest job is keeping people jealous, and Morris's presence in the Northern wilderness was itself a sign that he had not become what he had never been.

After Iceland, Morris had some weeks on and off at Kelmscott before the family was withdrawn to London again for the winter. He was busy with work for the firm, and in his spare time now mostly intent on his new craft of writing out and illuminating books ; occasionally while at Kelmscott he would go out fishing. " He went for a day's fishing in our punt," wrote Rossetti, " the chief result of which was a sketch I made, inscribed as follows :

" ' Enter Skald, moored in a punt,  
And Jacks and tenches exeunt,'—

and this seemed to be the course of events."

One way or another Morris got a good deal of badinage from Rossetti, but this should not obscure the fact that Rossetti continued to have the greatest admiration for Morris's work, and relied on him for sympathy and support for his own.

And yet the friendship between Top and Gabriel was for temperamental reasons wearing thin. Life at Kelmscott soon made their divergencies plain. In small things as in great they began to irritate one another too much for the experiment of the combined household to last. It would have come to an end even if there had not been the crisis about the firm in 1874.

## II

The *Vita Nuova* at Kelmscott really began in February of 1872, when Morris went down " to

see spring beginning, a sight I have seen little of for years, and am writing among the grey gables and rook-haunted trees, with a sense of the place being almost too beautiful to live in." Old and tranquil, with Thames sliding by through lush meadows, and Mousie in his field, and Mr. Hobbs's cattle grazing on the other side of the hedge, Kelmscott was a piece of changeless England, and to Morris henceforth a blessing of which he was never unconscious.

It was not a very comfortable house. Some of the rooms were almost as draughty and damp as Upton. There was not much fitness-for-purpose about it. It was not, as done up by Morris, an anticipation of the modern *machine à vivre*, in which the limitations of the occupants are so cleverly fastened on them with coils of wire and shackles of chromium steel—that is, if they have been able to bring any part of their humanity beyond the front-door mat. One may be sure that if Morris had had to move into a house where nothing was left for him to do but press a few buttons, he would have gone melancholy mad: he would have stored the coke in the bath, and torn the telephone out of the dado and thrown it at the first man who came to offer to sell him a radio set: he would have scribbled pictures all over the beautiful washable-paint walls, and with his teeth and his nails set *some* impress of human emotion on the furniture.

He loved, of course, the visual mellowness, the spiritual composure of his new home, which

had grown so naturally out of the soil and out of the past, and had nothing crude and jarring and ingenious about it, and he put into it furniture of all sorts, mediæval beds, modern wall-papers, Western tapestries, Eastern carpets, anything that went well and was good of its kind. He could not have stood for a moment the curious, isolated modernness that was to become fashionable half a century later, founding itself less on love of beauty than on a rambling biologicomechanistic philosophy of function.

The house, it is said, is a machine for living in. Then what sort of living, one would like to know, is the living the architect bears in mind when he builds? For lives are not quite shaped by occupations. Of course there is the great principle of labour-saving. . . .

It would have been interesting to be present while a salesman gave Morris a dissertation on the advantages of a stove (gas or electric) which the housewife had only to light, and set at 1, 2, or 3 for the roast to do itself to a turn, saving her labour—for what? "Let me tell you," Morris once roared out at a lady, "that there is more art in a well-cooked and well-served dinner than in a dozen oratorios!"

Though Morris became, later on, the doughtiest champion of better conditions for the people who have heavy and disagreeable work to do, he was wholly out of sympathy with the idea that it was a good thing for machines to do as much of *all* kinds of work as possible, with a view of nobody,

ultimately, having to put in more than an hour or two at their jobs, and everybody getting almost unlimited leisure—once more, for what? Endless oratorios, so to speak? The principle of labour-saving would have had to be very carefully defined and circumscribed if it was to be made acceptable to Morris, a man who was always setting himself more and more work to do, and was not in the least afraid of long hours, or a certain amount of sweat and dirt.

Kelmscott was a three-storied house built in L shape, made of local rubble and roofed with local slates, "the smaller ones to the top and the bigger ones towards the eaves, which gives one the same sort of pleasure in their orderly beauty as a fish's scales or a bird's feathers." The garden with its yew hedges was what a garden should be, an intermediate region between the man-made formality of the house, and the more natural *négligé* of the fields. Morris was not too Gothic to like this view of things, for he himself described the garden as being "if not part of the house, yet at least the clothes of it, which I think ought to be the aim of the layer out of a garden." Then there was a group of farm-buildings, with a barn and dovecot.

Kelmscott was neither built up by Morris from the foundations like the Red House, nor on the other hand taken over complete, or ever made into the kind of museum-house where visitors are quite afraid to put their feet on the carpets, and children and animals are not at home. Morris

simply hung carpets up on the wall if he thought them too precious to be on the floor. The children played about happily, and there were animals too, including Gabriel's dog Turvy, and the owl Mossy, which had been caught young on the roof, and sometimes came into the dining-room for meals and sat on the table.

For nearly two years Rossetti used the tapestry-room on the first floor as his studio, then he went downstairs to a room that he found less damp. The tapestry that gave the room its name was a not very valuable one, with "a bewildering story of Samson, not easy to piece together"; Rossetti only wished he could think of some way of covering it up. There was a risk of its perishing altogether if taken down, and as Morris insisted that it had an "air of romance" Rossetti thought he had better suffer it. So Samson looked on while the artist worked, and read Dumas, and received his friends.

One of these came into the story in 1872: the literary lawyer, Watts-Dunton. When he first visited Rossetti at Kelmscott he had not yet met Morris, who appeared during his stay for a day's fishing. Mousie was sent off to Lechlade station to fetch his master. Watts-Dunton and Rossetti were strolling on the road when Morris hove into sight. "And then I saw coming towards us on a rough, long-haired pony . . . the figure of a man in a wideawake—a figure so broad and

square that the breeze at his back seemed to be using him as a sail, and blowing both him and the pony towards us."

The lawyer did not get a very friendly greeting. "H'm," said Morris to Rossetti, "I thought you were alone." But after this unpromising start Morris began asking Watts-Dunton questions, and a little later invited him to go fishing; and Watts-Dunton, amused and flattered, and rather touched, and stirred by what he began to perceive that was greatness in the bluff, broad man's nature—accepted.

Watts-Dunton was quick in the uptake. He talked only about the business in hand. He said that years ago he had fished in the Ouse quite often, and enjoyed it very much.

"How old were you when you used to fish in the Ouse?" asked Morris.

"Oh, all sorts of ages; it was at all sorts of times, you know."

"Well, how young then?"

"Say ten or twelve."

"When you got a bite at ten or twelve, did you get as interested, as excited, as I get when I see my float bob?"

"No."

"I thought not," said Morris, abruptly winding up the subject, but probably without intending the "world of disparagement" that the sensitive Watts-Dunton always believed had been the deserts of watching his fellow-angler more narrowly than his float.

All the old friends now began to come to Kelmscott: Faulkner, the Burne-Joneses (seldom), Madox Brown—who had some difficulty in finding a white pig to paint: really a nuisance for a Pre-Raphaelite—Ellis, who was later to replace Rossetti as co-tenant with Morris, and Philip Webb, and many new friends besides. Of Ellis there is this limerick by Rossetti:

“ There’s a publishing party named Ellis,  
Who’s addicted to poets with bellies  
He has at least two—  
One in fact, one in view—  
And God knows what will happen to Ellis.”

The one in fact was Morris, now however less stout than before, and the one in view, Rossetti himself.

### III

It was Philip Webb who seems to have understood most exactly the twofold and complementary effects Kelmscott had on Morris. The house and its neighbourhood were “a great gain to W.M. as a retiring-place, in which he could gather himself together from the degrading influences of modern life,” and so much beauty realised made the England of slums, and slag-heaps, and restored churches, and jerry-built villas, and rows and rows of unhandsome streets, all the more pitiful by contrast: each “new element of change had tenfold brutal force in its vulgarisation from the collected purity and simplicity on which it was settling down.” When

a chimney-stack at Buscot, across the Thames, that had been one of the rare local eyesores, was one day destroyed, Webb drank feelingly with Morris to celebrate the event, and "to a reformation of manners in the future. Alas!" Webb added, "the drinking was not sufficient in quantity." Later on they did more than quaff a tankard for the cause.

A gift of Morris's that helped to make for his happiness all through life was the ability to detach himself from his worries whenever he was doing anything that pleased him. At Kelmscott he had many natural pleasures at hand. His attentiveness to the landscape in a thousand details, his knowledge of the birds and their song, his familiarity with churches, cottages, and barns, amounted to an identification of himself with as much of the countryside as an artist can love and a philosopher approve; and he put some of beauty that he found into the literature of his country, and some of it into the works of his hands, and now and again, in a charming lyrical way, combined the two in the verses he worked into his tapestry.

"I am the ancient Apple Queen—  
As once I was so am I now,  
For evermore a hope unseen  
Betwixt the blossom and the bough.

Ah, where's the river's hidden Gold!  
And where the windy grave of Troy?  
Yet come I as I came of old,  
From out the heart of Summer's joy."



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THE MORRIS AND BURNE-JONES FAMILIES

That is *Pomona* ; this is *The Forest* :

“ PEAR-TREE

By woodman's edge I faint and fall ;  
By craftsman's edge I tell the tale.

CHESTNUT-TREE

High in the wood, high o'er the hall,  
Aloft I rise when low I fall.

OAK-TREE

Unmoved I stand what wind may blow,  
Swift, swift before the wind I go.”

Morris's epic poems will never be very popular, and his prose has been quoted in handbooks as offering extreme examples of Wardour-Street English, but these light, beautiful pieces by the busy, bearded, combative shopkeeper of Queen Square are a wonder about which there can be no two opinions. Topsy must have been a “ big poet ” to write these little things.

It was not long before Morris got to know all there was to be known about the architecture for many miles round Kelmscott—good and bad, and restorations past, in course of being committed and projected. The way he wrote and talked about buildings of all kinds was fluent in a remarkable degree : he might have been telling one of his stories, the impression is always so vivid, so exciting ; and it is obvious that beams would reveal their secrets to him and stones sing together for him on the briefest acquaintance.

One of the finds that thrilled him most was

the tithe-barn at Great Coxwell in Berkshire. It is a thirteenth-century barn, a hundred and fifty feet long, and, as a Restoration topographer had observed :

“ With pillars and rafters all of main tree,  
No saw touched them as you may see.”

When Morris took Webb there he was all a-tremble lest his expert friend's opinion should in any way dash his own, for according to it Coxwell was one of the finest buildings in the world. He might have spared himself his anxiety ; Webb said of the barn that it was truly unapproachable in its dignity : as beautiful as a cathedral. When he was recording his memories of that day, putting himself as usual second to Morris, he wrote : “ If I saw what it all meant in that quiet landscape of Berkshire and its clear history of the builders and their craft, how much more must he have seen into it and round it ? ”

Now this modesty and this caution were charming in Webb, and not more otiose in fact than sincerely meant, for Morris did see more into and round Coxwell than he did.

Webb's constructivism has already been mentioned. It was a praiseworthy tendency in him, a mid-Victorian architect, breathing the air of pastiche and Gilbert Scott. Ruskin's good ideas in this gas-chamber were so reviving that it would not have been disgraceful in a man of feeling to gulp the bad ones down as well. But Webb kept his head. He gave, for admiring

Coxwell, the un-Ruskinian reason that it was "a perfectly suitable barn and nothing else." Fitness-for-purpose—but was that all? Would not the barn have been as good for storing grain if the proportions had been less excellent, the details less dainty?

That was how Morris saw more into and round Coxwell than Webb: he saw in its beauty the reflection of an age when he believed that "every one that made anything, made a work of art besides a useful piece of goods." There may never have been such an age all complete, but there has been widespread—and why shall there not be again?—a sense that beauty is something over and above the useful, a flowering of joy out of the wealth of unexploited, unstrained emotion in the human heart.

Morris wanted useful things to be beautiful; beautiful things seemed valuable to him even if they were not so much useful as simply in use. He could, for instance, hardly have claimed that wall-papers were an indispensable part of the walls which keep houses standing or divide rooms from one another. And once the propriety of having wall-papers at all has been conceded, the question of what they are to be like is æsthetic, and fitness-for-purpose hardly enters in. Further, once the most practical kind of structure for a teapot, which is a utilitarian object, has been decided on—the spout to be put low down enough for a thorough infusion to be obtained—the problem of its beauty or ornateness remains one of taste.

The same applies to houses, and all other things made where it is thought desirable for beauty to be mixed with efficiency. Webb reacted against the bad planning made worse by pretentious ornamentation that was the order of the Victorian day. The modern constructivist, however, has carried the position forward—into the desert. He pursues a mirage: the illusion that beauty, like use, has a purpose outside itself. One can sit down on the useful part of a chair, but not on its beauty; so the function sitting down is no guide to the way a chair ought to be decorated or made beautiful—the designer must only take care that the beauty does not interfere with the comfortable sitting down. There are, of course, various degrees of comfort, and opinions differ as to the degree appropriate in any particular case; Morris, for instance, did not want as much of it as on the whole modern people believe to be the least that is necessary. Upon some one criticising a chair he had designed he answered abruptly: "If you want to be comfortable, go to bed."

Fitness-for-purpose, anyhow, must be understood to be a definition of beauty satisfying only to people with a different view of life as well as of art from Morris. What Morris had come to believe about the relations of beauty to everyday life must seem to any one who studies his career to have been pretty implicit in his words and deeds long before he took Webb to Coxwell; but one can see it could not have been so clear at the

time, since the incompatibility of his faith with fitness-for-purpose had not yet become accentuated, and the adversary then was still the materialistic vandalism of commerce, and not also the materialistic ideal of the constructivists.

Besides the barn, Morris made another find at Great Coxwell. In the church he came on two brasses inscribed as follows :

“ Here lieth WILLM MORYS  
sutyme fermer of Cokyswell  
on whose soule ihu have mercy amen.”

“ Here lieth JOHANE  
the Wyf of Willm Morys  
on whose soule ihu have mercy amen.”

Morris's fifteenth-century namesake was represented in a short gown, with a pouch hanging from his girdle. Morris was delighted. It was as if the roots of his being were now proved to have been struck from old time in this soil of the heart of England, and as if he had been born again in due season like a piece of the sempiternal landscape that had come to mean more to him than heaven and hell, and which he loved more than he feared death.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### I

ALTHOUGH, till it came to the vikings, Rossetti admired Morris's poetry, and Morris admired Rossetti's, one might think the divergences of their characters, personal and literary, had been by 1871 obvious long enough for critics to be fully aware of them. The differences between them were of taste, temper, sentiment, and aim—no less. But Robert Buchanan, writing in *The Contemporary Review* for October 1871, bracketed them together in an unholy trio with Swinburne. The article, "The Fleshly School of Modern Poetry," became notorious at once. It appeared over the signature "Thomas Maitland"; a few months later Buchanan, on the defensive, republished it in an amplified form under his own name. The identity of "Maitland" had never been a mystery to the men he attacked.

Now though Buchanan, by giving way to his jealousy of Rossetti, and in lesser degree of Swinburne and Morris, disqualified himself for criticism, he was not wrong in feeling that there was something interesting to be said about the "morality" of certain modern poets in France and England. Unfortunately he was also too thoroughbred a puritan to take an intelligent

impartial view of any poetry that was not exclusively uplifting. According to him, "poor old John Donne" died a literary death from the "disease" of sensuality; and one cannot help suspecting that the only reason why he agreed that *some* of Dante and Shakespeare was clean, was that it would have led to too much troublesome correspondence in *The Athenæum* if he had not.

Even if Buchanan had understood, instead of only shuddering at, the varieties of sexual proclivity, he would have had to be a cleverer man than he evidently was to be able fairly to present an analysis of Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris to his readers. He would have found it necessary to invent a method of bringing more of life within the scope of English literature than had been naturalised up to date. In some respects the eighteen-seventies are very far away; farther away than the seventeen-seventies. In 1870, for instance, Anthony Trollope, writing a novel about a girl who had got into trouble through no wickedness of her own, took care to anticipate in a preface "moral" objections that might be raised to a sympathetic presentation of her case. "It is not long since," he wrote, ". . . that the very existence of such a condition of life, as was hers, was supposed to be unknown to our sisters and daughters. . . . Then arises that further question, how far the condition of such unfortunates should be made a matter of concern to the sweet young hearts of those whose delicacy

and cleanliness of thought is a matter of pride to so many of us." This apologetic tone was about as much called for, in equity, as requests for forgiveness from a dog on whose paws some one has clumsily trodden.

But we have got to do as Trollope wisely did, and take the age for what it was. When Buchanan wrote *The Fleshly School* it would have been hard for even anyone well disposed to Rossetti and Swinburne, and who hesitated to call a certain strain in their work "fleshly," to use another word if he wanted to be sure of his readers knowing what he was talking about, for it was not till the end of the century that it became possible to apply "decadent," with its more melancholy and less damnatory suggestion, for the morbid part of what Buchanan meant by fleshly. To-day, of course, Signor Praz can write intimately of Swinburne's "algolagnia" without seeming in the least angry, or disapproving, or even sad.

Buchanan had a simple outlook ; according to it, bodily love is not nice. "I fear," he says of Rossetti, ". . . that he regards the feeling for a young woman's person, face, heart, and mind as in itself quite a spiritual sentiment." He was loath to incriminate Morris—"generally so innocent"—but felt obliged to do so, owing to his "ever-present *undertone* of fleshliness." It does not seem worth puzzling over the contradiction : how can one be generally innocent and constantly fleshly ? In short, Buchanan found

the three poets more or less vicious, and not, as he carefully proved, very good craftsmen ; and the next stage was Max Nordau coming along with an equipment of some primitive psychology to show that they were lunatics. " Swinburne is, in Magnan's phrase, a ' higher degenerate,' while Rossetti should be counted among Sollier's imbeciles. . . . Morris is intellectually far more healthy. . . ." Beyond his " poetical ventriloquism " there were " not many features of " degeneracy " to notice in him. He did, however, tend to fall into " outspoken echolalia " ; for example, in such lines as :

" Of Margaret sitting glorious there  
In glory of gold and glory of hair  
And glory of glorious face most fair."

Buchanan had not been the first to think that Morris's attitude towards morals was not strict enough. Passages in *Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise* had caused comment. Really, the way Medea had gone into Jason's bedroom while he was asleep there, without so much as knocking at the door, and when they had never been introduced . . . !

The Buchanan business upset Rossetti's nerves. Swinburne retorted sharply with " *The Stealthy School of Modern Criticism.*" Morris took no notice.

The serious truth is that images of sadness and cruelty contained no pleasure for Morris. He had none of Swinburne's morbid masochistic desire

to get the rod. Knowledge of the self-destructive elements in human nature was a torment to him. On the other hand, he certainly would have regarded "the feeling for a young woman's person" as in itself "quite a spiritual sentiment"; for to him the spirit was chiefly knowable and lovable through its outward forms. There was perhaps more piety in his reverence for the masterpiece of the Creation, a beautiful woman, than there is in the censoriousness of prudes

## II

Buchanan, pottering enviously along, even has a gibe at Morris's Icelandic travels: he was annoyed that they should have attracted attention while his own holiday jaunts went unreported. He had not the least idea of the significance of those travels, though they bore so immediately on Morris's cleansing from the only kind of fleshliness of which he was ever innocently guilty. When *Sigurd* was done, it was the climax of a process of sublimation that left Morris purified and strengthened, 'ready at last to bear, besides the burdens imposed on him by his own passionate nature, wide responsibilities of his own choosing.

*Sigurd* was not a popular success like *The Earthly Paradise*. On the other hand, while sales were not gratifying, then and since poets and professors have bestowed on it much almost unqualified praise. Colossal—among the fore-

most poems of literature—according to Mr. MacKail, “unsurpassed in the world for epic grandeur and tragic tension.”— Even this is not enough for Mr. Noyes. For Mr. MacKail, like certain others, does not approve of the way Morris opened with the tale of Sigmund, instead of at the point “at which Sigurd’s conscious life begins,” while Mr. Noyes insists that this epic is a law unto itself.

Morris himself felt he had done well in *Sigurd*, and so he had, for there could hardly be a more complete dossier of evidence of how a great man set about heroically mastering the old truculent Fafnir in his soul.

Great men and little men all, with Buchanan’s permission, have their fleshliness. They have desires, some of which take clear shapes, while others are felt as a vaguer sense of consolations due from life, and others again remain hidden in unconsciousness, making it hard to know when they have been appeased. And this is to say nothing of an intermediate brood of petty lusts that people are aware of, not in distorted dreams, but suddenly, from time to time, in a day-dream, often when the means are at hand for surreptitiously gratifying them. Afterwards they seem to have been almost unreal, and not to belong to that real world of everyday life where what matters so much, curiously enough, is appearances.

How ought a man to live? The question becomes disquietingly urgent when a passionate and powerful character feels that opportunity is

inadequately serving his desire. Fate did not always spoil Cæsar and Croesus, and Charlemagne and his Paladins had their rebuffs. There may be folk in humbler circumstances than these with no complexes—perhaps an occasional naked and resplendent South Sea Islander, or a specially favoured man-about-town—but for a middle-class man with ideals, a poet with fire and to spare, there is not likely to be an easy adjustment to the world.

When William Morris touched the prime of manhood he had many blessings, and did not fail to count them. But though he had a beautiful wife, two young daughters whom he adored, interesting work, and a growing fame, and money at his back, it would be a mistake to fancy that he was necessarily living to the full limit of his fierce emotions and extraordinary powers. Then there was always the possibility that after the strain of his efforts to be reasonable he might be suffering the usual penalties : the Parthian shots of unreason dethroned, poisoned arrows that infect the spirit they touch with strange humours and hungers, and terrors by night and day. The ease with which a word or a symbol can precipitate nations back into the cruel frame of mind of the Dark Ages is the measure of the effort it costs a man to rise to the height of his humanity. There have been eager natures, like St. Francis, who have risen like a Phoenix from the ashes of their own shame ; others, rising too quickly, have fallen and remained abased.

Morris, a hero keeping a shop in Bloomsbury, was not yet in 1870 captain of his soul or ready for his final mission to be a prophet. He had reached the kind of crisis at life's prime at which many a man has consoled himself with making a little excursion into the *demi-monde*. But light love affairs solved nothing for Morris. He was too one-and-indivisibly impassioned to be successful in gallantry. It was not inhibitions that frustrated him, it was the vastness and urgency of his hankerings. Dr. Johnson observed that "were it not for imagination, Sir, a man would be as happy in the arms of a chambermaid as of a duchess." Morris, from his curt confession, seems to have found imagination avail little to bedizen the difference between one woman encountered and another. Carrying the argument a logical step further than Dr. Johnson, Napoleon said "*la femme n'a pas de rang*," and Morris, still more disgruntled, "they all taste alike." But on the plane of poetry imagination did not fail him. He knew what they might, indeed what they sometimes really did taste like: exquisite and holy beyond the power of words to describe. So now, following his bent, he took ship with his discontents for Iceland, and there he came to grips with the ancient enemy; and loved Brynhild with a love stronger than death, and grieved hopelessly with Gudrun, and was moved with ineffable pity for the injustice that besets mankind, and died with Sigurd by the hand of Gut-torm; and lived again. He had had to purge

himself from more than the bitterness of private longings unassuaged.

The experts have judged favourably of Morris's skill with that plainly very dangerous mode, rhyming anapæstic couplets. To the layman glancing through *Sigurd* there will inevitably seem to occur passages of almost comic doggerel. But there can be no mistake about it really : the terror and pity and pathos of this poem have not been overrated. As one reads, and as " the tale of the golden warrior speeds on from isle to isle," there grows in the eye of the imagination a gallant vision of Sigurd, an embodiment " of human vitality concentrated to a point of quenchless light," which is a description written not of Sigurd, but of Morris himself, by a man who, though he was never one of the inmost circle of great friends, got to know him very well.

" Now spread is the snare of treason, and cast is the net of  
guile,  
And the mirk-wood gleams with the ambush, and venom  
lurks at the board ;  
And whiles and again for a little the fair fields gleam with  
the sword,  
And the host of the isle-folk gather, nigh numberless of tale :  
But how shall its bulk and its writhing the willow-log avail  
When the red flame lives amidst it ? "

Sigurd is irresistible till he has lent himself unwittingly to the scheming of " otherwise " old Grimhild, to whom the means seemed justified by the end she had in view, as they usually seem to politicians and ambitious mothers. The upshot

was not a triumph for her clannish and overbearing selfishness. Before long, when the evil has been done beyond repair, Sigurd awakens to the truth of how his happiness and Brynhild's have been ruined for ever.

“ He hath seen the face of Brynhild, and he knows why she  
hath come,  
And that his is the hand that hath drawn her to the Cloudy  
People's home .  
He knows of the net of the days, and the deeds that the  
gods have bid,  
And no whit of the sorrow that shall be from his wakened  
soul is hid .  
And his glory his heart restraineth, and restraineth the  
hand of the strong  
From the hope of the fools of desire and the wrong that  
amendeth wrong.”

It is very difficult to quote usefully from the poem. One could more easily take passages out of their context if the intention was to turn them to ridicule. As one reads, the strong emotion behind the words soon imposes itself, and carries one up and forward relentlessly to the tragic end of those too-late-repentant Niblungs—the blood-brothers and murderers of Sigurd.

Morris was as careful about the craft of poetry as about printing wall-papers or cottons, and his faults, except in spelling, are never of negligence. He had his strong views on prosody. Once, about this time, a waiter at the “ Cock ” in Fleet Street said to Watts-Dunton: “ That was a loudish gent, a-lunching with you yesterday, sir. I thought you was a-coming to blows.”

The gent. was Morris, and what he had been saying that seemed to bode violence was : " The use of blank verse as a poetic medium ought to be stopped by Act of Parliament for at least two generations."

*Sigurd* came out in the winter of 1876 ; a month earlier Morris had written a letter to the *Daily News* about the Eastern Question. These events mark an important date in Morris's career. Certain phases were now past, and his public life was about to begin.

What had happened by the time *Sigurd* was published was that Morris had come into his own. He had from early youth lived a good, practical, individualistic life, and now he was going to find the strength to do as well a thing he had no taste for whatever—mix himself up in public affairs : contemporary affairs, about which the most conspicuous feature was the absence of the heroic mediæval glamour that meant so much to him. This was a world of cheap tin trays into which he was on the point of stepping—and cheap tin ideals ; great material wealth side by side with the most pitiful destitution, and England championing the Unspeakable Turk abroad, while at home Gilbert Scott rushed up and down through the country pulling down old churches and then "restoring" them, to complete the uglification demanded by the age.

The two main phases of Morris's life were so far from being antithetical that we, wise—overwise—after the event, may fancy the second

developing more easily from the first than it did. Still, biographers are in a position to clear themselves of the charge of making an artificial chapter-ending about 1876 purely for the convenience of their story. The year 1876 was the tail-end of a hyphen, and the hyphen was Iceland.

The transformation of Morris into a public servant was in no way illogical, only it was not simple for the particular subject. A milder man, a more conventionally religious man, almost any man not born a hero could have taken up politics as he did, always with the reservation that the middle-class man taking up Socialist politics in the 'seventies would have had to be, though not a hero, a man of grit. For the hero, with his special sensibilities, there had to be Iceland, and temptation of the Devil, and a challenge thrown to fear and doubt and disruption, and victory won, before he could go on boldly to fulfil his destiny.

There ought to be no difficulty in seeing that it is easier for a great moralist to begin, like St. Francis, by having his fling, and then, when his senses have been appeased, to become virtuous and self-sacrificing, than it is for a Morris, already "one of the finest little fellows alive" long before Gabriel pointed out the fact, just to go on getting finer. "Every day in every way I get better and better"—that is all very well for people who have nothing much the matter with them, particularly no superfluity of an heroic mania. The conclusion of the Iceland experience was no more

foregone than saintliness is the usual sequel to debauch ; and when one considers the distracting passions that had to be subdued by Morris's prophetic soul, then his career without lapse or inconsistency comes to seem one of those achievements by a human being that have a vicarious moral significance for everybody (who cares about such things) for ever. He was the successor of the Golden Man ; and to whom shall we turn, rather than to him, when the world is upheaved by fresh eruptions of the fatal Niblung pride, and when freedom and brotherhood are made mock of ?

It is in his prose writings, including his letters, that we come closest to him. When writing not too formally Morris expressed himself with a cumulative vigour that causes the interruptive rhythm of his style—at first so striking because of its unfamiliarity, and a little irritating to the modern ear—gradually to be lost in the sense of what he means to say ; and then his words become tokens of a sympathy so fathomless that one might think there was no need to look elsewhere for sentiments more touching or kind. The following passage is part of a letter Morris wrote to a friend who was in great distress of mind, and is in some respects typical, though more directly outspoken about his own faith than usual :

" . . . I am sure that though I have many hopes and pleasures, or at least strong ones, and that though my life is dear to me, so much as I

seem to have to do, I would give them away, hopes and pleasures, one by one or all together, and my life at last, for you, for my friendship, for my honour, for the world. If it seems boasting I do not mean it : but rather that I claim, so to say it, not to be separated from those that are heavy-hearted only because I am well in health and full of pleasant work and eager about it, and not oppressed by desires so as not to be able to take interest in it all. I wish I could say something that would serve you, beyond what you know very well, that I love you and long to help you : and indeed I entreat you (however trite the words may be) to think that life is not empty nor made for nothing, and that the parts of it fit into one another in some way ; and that the world goes on, beautiful and strange and dreadful and worshipful."

### III

Even earlier than 1874 it would have been no more than a sensible precaution for the partners in Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. to arrange for the firm to be dissolved, but in the absence of a crisis none of them thought of making a move till then.

Since the firm had been registered before the Limited Liability Act of 1862, it was always possible that Morris's experiments might involve his six partners in losses. On the other hand, whereas the business was practically Morris's

own, and his chief source of income, he legally had no more than a one-seventh share in its profits, assets, and goodwill. This was not altogether fair, and not comfortable for a married man with two children. Besides, without Morris's private loans the firm would not have survived more than a year or two, and without the ideas and hard work he had put into it there would soon after the start have been no firm to die or live—it would just have faded away.

The total amount of money the other six were supposed to have invested was £120. There seems a doubt whether even that little was paid up. What they had got out of it was not so much profits as fees now and again for designs : and these sums had come in pretty useful. Now that dissolution had been decided upon, three of the partners claimed that their fair price was about £4000, which meant that Morris, who of course intended to go on with the business, would have been required to find £8000 if Burne-Jones, Faulkner, and Webb had not at once dissociated themselves from Madox Brown, Marshall, and Rossetti, and refused to stand on rights which may have been rights in law, but which did not seem to them to be justice.

Ted felt very ashamed at the prospect of a lawsuit—"the spectacle of a set of old friends breaking down in this humiliating way." It did not come to that, for Morris preferred to buy the three claimants out. He wrote in disgust to his mother: "The law is too ticklish a matter for

one to throw one's whole chances of livelihood into it ; and I think I have done the best I could after all : though 'tis a deal of money to pay for sheer nothing and I doubt if their claims would have been recognised in the Court of Chancery—however 'tis all done now I hope." It was certainly easy money for Rossetti and Madox Brown, and easier still for Marshall, for he could not make out that *his* reputation had been a draw in the early days.

Rossetti had already given up his share of Kelmscott, and soon after the dissolution Morris stopped seeing him. All things considered, it is wonderful that these two had managed to get on for so long, both of them so positive and highly strung. It was nearly twenty years since the days of the Mag. and Red Lion Square, and Topsy imitating Gabriel as much as he could. Sharing Kelmscott, a scheme in keeping with cherished principles, was a mistake ; one feels that they were old enough to know better than to take such a risk. Not that Gabriel's painting and playful idolising and romanticising of Jane was likely to have embarrassed any one after so many years. Even the curious insistence with which in the Kelmscott days Gabriel painted Jane as Proserpine, captive wife of the king of darkness, even the verses he wrote for one of the pictures :

" And still some heart unto some soul doth pine,  
(Whose sounds mine inner sense is fain to bring  
Continually together murmuring)—  
' Woe's me for thee, unhappy Proserpine ! ' "

even these faintly tactless goings on do not seem to been taken in bad part by Morris. At any rate, there is no hint of a sudden triangle drama. On the other hand, it is probable that Topsy disliked the company of pet owls for dinner. He did not like animals as *pets*. And there is this: Gabriel now tended to treat with flippancy subjects that were becoming very holy to Topsy. Just when Topsy was girding up his loins for the great fights and sacrifices of later days, Gabriel was running to seed: most earnest when he was most morbid, and at other times hardly earnest at all. If one were allowed to know, first, the exact words Gabriel used to express his opinion that the transformation of the dragon in *Sigurd* was silly, and then Topsy's answer unexpurgated, one would get the pent-up atmosphere of the last stage of their friendship in a nutshell. Gabriel had thought *Love is Enough* very good, but Topsy's Volsungs oppressed him; he found them barbarous, as indeed, whatever their virtues, they were. And Iceland had such a hold on Morris during the early 'seventies that when he was taken to Italy—Florence and Siena—in 1873 he managed to keep his eyes shut to some of the most beautiful things ever made by hands, and going directly after to Iceland on his second visit, came back "more enslaved with passion for ice and snow and raw fish than ever—I fear," said Burne-Jones to Fairfax Murray, "I shall never drag him to Italy again."

Gabriel was out of sympathy with the vikings, and he was out of his element at Lechlade. Top had endured being teased by Gabriel and the others for twenty years, and had never been more than momentarily furious about the wettest water-jug that had tumbled on to his head, but it was different to be teased indirectly, through his beloved countryside, not by any series of witticisms, but all the time by Gabriel's attitude, and in the way he behaved as well as in what he said. It was more than teasing, because Gabriel did not only pretend to find fault : he really felt almost as much unsettled in the "sweet simple old place" as Top thought him unsettling. Then one day Gabriel was very rude to some of the local people—in a sense a trifle : a last straw.

The estrangement was complete before the publication of *Sigurd*. This is how Morris afterwards summed up his lost friend. "He was not a happy man, being too self-centred, though very kind, and fair in his judgments of people."

Gabriel's friendship with Jane was not broken. Jane was a reasonable person. She took the children to visit Gabriel at Bognor. Occasionally she went by herself to dine with him at Cheyne Walk, and no one can deny that these rendezvous were managed with a laudable discretion. Gabriel's companion, Hall Caine, would get a note : "The lady I spoke about has arrived and will stay with me to dinner. In these circumstances I will ask you to be good enough to dine in your own room to-night." Though Hall Caine

knew who she was he never once set eyes on her. He admired the relations of Gabriel and Jane as the "most beautiful of friendships."

Why should Jane have given up Gabriel? She had not asked Top to be less comradely with Georgie because her own relationship with her had waned.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### I

“To an American,” wrote Henry James about forty years before he was naturalised an Englishman, “it” (Chester Cathedral) “is a genuine cathedral and awakens all the proper emotions. Among them is a certain irresistible regret that so much of its hoary substance should give place to the fine, fresh-coloured masonry with which Mr. Gilbert Scott—that man of many labors—is so remorselessly investing it.” At a cost, as Mr. James perhaps did not know, of £80,000.

So he wrote in 1872; but being a man of letters with a sense of the past, he might, on beholding Gilbert Scott’s restorations, have felt all the proper emotions even if he had been born a native of the country he afterwards adopted. Ruskin did not have to go abroad to learn to detest the activities of the Camden Society. It was from abroad, nevertheless, from Pisa, that he sent up one of his earliest cries against the spoilers everywhere; from Italy, which even now seems to the twentieth-century Englishman of sensibility a blessed, unvulgarised land. “I do believe,” said Ruskin in 1847, “that I shall live to see the ruin of everything good and great in the world, and have nothing left to hope for but

the fires of judgment to shrivel up the cursed idiocy of mankind." By this time Gilbert Scott had been launched—he had just won a competition in connection with a German church—and he was well out into his career when ten years later Morris, aged twenty-one, described Ely as "horribly spoilt" with restorations—"as they facetiously call them."

As Henry James in Chester Cathedral nestled among "the vast oaken architecture of the stalls," waiting to hear a sermon by Kingsley (which, rather to his glee, turned out thin and disappointing), he felt the caress of all that mellow glory, that secure and hoarded gentlemanliness that meant so much to him. He allowed his reflections to dwell on the beauties of English conservatism. "Conservatism," he thought, "has the cathedrals, the colleges, the castles, the gardens, the traditions, the associations, the fine names, the better manners, the poetry; Dissent"—and to this he also joined Democracy—"has the dusky brick chapels in provincial by-streets, the names out of Dickens, the uncertain tenure of the *h*, and the poor *mens sibi conscia recti*."

It was a tolerably true word; and of that first list there was no element except perhaps, in certain aspects, the better manners, that William Morris was not peculiarly fitted to appreciate, or qualified to conserve, or, as in the case of the poetry, destined to enrich; there was not a gentleman in England more devastated than he by what one saw in the by-streets. Yet Morris

was about to show that the *mens sibi conscia recti* was not after all the monopoly, however poor and unsatisfactory, of the other side, and soon not only were the cathedrals and colleges and castles finding in him their chief preserver, but also the people with names—and grievances—out of Dickens were looking to him as their champion and humble servant. What more appropriate, under the circumstances, than that his manager (and guardian angel) should be a Mr. Wardle?

In the year so critical for him, 1876, his resentment of architectural abuses ripened into action.

On a market day that summer Morris and Jane and the children paid one of their visits to Burford. The village was packed with farmers, their men, and their stock; the streets were bustling with rude, red-faced drovers, and through their midst proceeded the Morris family, undoubtedly looking very odd to the countrymen, some of whom were by this time more or less tipsy. There was Morris himself with his beard, in his blue serge suit but no hat or tie, and as usual (we may be allowed to believe) a button missing from his jacket, and Jane and the young girls in bright unfashionable gowns designed at home: charming but exotic. It seems that one yokel allowed himself a too direct guffaw. He got from Morris a flash of such suppressed rage that the blood ran out of his tanned cheeks. So it was already not in a good temper that the poet

came to the church—to find ignorant restoration going on here too.

He sought out the vicar and took it on himself to expostulate. The vicar answered that he could do what he pleased ; if he wanted to stand on his head in the aisle nobody was going to prevent him. Morris could mind his own business.

He began to lay his plans after this. In March 1877 he opened his campaign with a letter to *The Athenæum*, in which he said some very stark things about Gilbert Scott, and in April the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings was formed, with Morris as secretary, and Webb and Faulkner as his chief supporters. By summer of the following year the committee included Carlyle, Ruskin, Bryce, Lubbock, Lord Houghton, Leslie Stephen, Aldis Wright, Bywater, Patmore, Charles Keene, Holman Hunt, and Burne-Jones, and meetings were at first held in the new Oxford Street showrooms of Morris & Co.

It was high time something was done. In a moment of despair Morris said : “ It looks as if they will see what we mean just as the last old building is destroyed.”

What did they mean ? Not all of them quite the same thing as Morris. To him as to Webb the destruction of an old building was murder ; as Webb said of such a place : “ You see, it’s my grandmother ! ” (Morris was not so ready as Carlyle to acknowledge Wren’s City Churches among his ancestors.) But Morris, with his sense of beauty as a joy for ever, saw that old buildings

are more than venerable. Plenty of Gilbert Scott's originals were more old-womanish than some of the lovely churches he was supposed to be rejuvenating, but was really condemning to masquerade as frights in his own poor Gothic. For all his archæological knowledge Morris did not take too objective a view of the whole question. He understood the social implications of love for, or indifference to, the art of the past. Our old buildings are part of what we can love in our country ; they are never dead while they stand. They are, on the contrary, living embodiments of tradition, and only die when we deliberately take picks and hammers to put an end to them, or when the restorer has done the equivalent by making them unrecognisable. How can people have a sincere love for an architecture not yet materialised if they are ready to consign to destruction beautiful old houses and churches and barns they are familiar with, and have had every chance of getting to cherish ?

The S.P.A.B., nicknamed by Morris "Anti-scape," had a complicated task before it. There had to be a certain amount of straightforward propaganda ; the public had to be taught its duty of guarding jealously the " gifts our forefathers left us, and not merely their sites and names." This involved the compilation of lists of ancient monuments all over the country, with details of their condition—whether unrestored, or threatened with destruction or restoration, or in process of being restored. Members of the

Committee travelled about visiting "cases," writing letters of protest when necessary, and doing their best to stir up the public conscience both locally and through the newspapers generally. Morris found time for some of this work of inspection, and could be seen in country inns shaking his fist through the window at philistine parsons, or heard in cathedral vestries being very rude to unregenerate canons.

The Society also tried to bring to light the right principles for restoring old buildings. The Camden Society's idea of restoration, where a church was concerned, had been to rebuild it in the "best" style of which it bore any trace, and as their passion was Decorated, they nearly always managed to find a window or a porch to give them an excuse for doing what they wanted. In the case of Perpendicular churches they did not bother to argue. Their *realpolitik* was to pull it down and rebuild it Decorated.

Gilbert Scott had taken a different view. He considered that his duty was to restore places to their original condition, and so would pull down the Perpendicular and Decorated nine-tenths of a church and rebuild them to match, as he believed, the Early English remaining tenth, the result of course not being Early English but Gilbert Scott. But the S.P.A.B. were out, as their title announced, to protect, to keep buildings as far as possible as they were, and the only restoration they admitted was strengthening worn fabrics either by the most patient and discreet

repairs or, if that could not be done, by perfectly frank patching. Webb worked out a system. He would mine into decayed walls from the inside, and fill up the holes with blue brick in cement. In other cases he used visible supports and splicings. Where walls had peeled or were rotting superficially owing to the action of smoke he applied coats of limewash. There was no whole-hog restoration *à la* Camden or Scott.

The committee meetings of the Society were held on Thursdays at five o'clock, from November 1879, at an office rented in Buckingham Street, Strand. Newman Marks had taken over the secretarial work from Morris; after some years he was succeeded by Thackeray Turner. Morris would no more have missed a meeting than Sunday breakfast with Burne-Jones at the Grange. He used to come along from his business, often arm-in-arm with Wardle, and by common consent was allowed to express his views before anyone else. In his enforced absence Webb, if he was there, presided. When they were both there, Webb, utterly loyal, never questioned anything Morris said. The meetings lasted about two hours, and after them Morris and Webb and other friends—in later years Emery Walker and Sydney Cockerell were often of the party—would go across and relax on the plush at Gatti's, which, with its dull gold curtains and curling candelabra, was not then (if one may borrow a phrase from Max Beerbohm) fancy dress, as it is now.

From the beginning the tone Morris took on

the S.P.A.B. committee was not that of a pure antiquary. The emotions old buildings evoked in him characteristically overflowed the confines of conservatism. To him it was not only the legacy from the past that was at issue, but also the health and happiness of the people to whom that legacy had been bequeathed, the people of to-day, to turn whom from their ingratitude, and their whoring after strange gods, and their resignation to corrugated iron he more and more felt it to be his mission.

Evidently that was not to be the whole of his mission. A breath of positive and democratic idealism begins to animate his utterances. The people of to-day in whom he had hopes, for whose souls he felt the most part of his solicitude, were the masses. "The workman of to-day," he said at a meeting of the S.P.A.B., "is no artist; it is the hope of my life that this one day may be changed; that popular art may grow again in our midst; that we may have an architectural style, the growth of our own times, but connected with all history."

These were not the sentiments of a connoisseur and antiquary so much as of a reformer.

## II

The early years of the S.P.A.B. were very busy ones for Morris. The firm had lately started experimenting with dyes, and when Morris was satisfied that he had got the colours he wanted,

to supersede the hated anilines, he embarked on weaving textiles. In addition to organising these new departures, and carrying on with his ordinary routine of designing and supervising, he was now acting as Treasurer of the Eastern Question Association.

The E.Q.A. consisted of people to whom the policy of their Foreign Office with regard to Russia and Turkey—the policy of Palmerston and Prince Albert and Disraeli—had come to look profoundly immoral. What had rather suddenly determined a number of private citizens like Morris to take a hand in foreign politics was horror at the news of the massacres done by the Turks in Bulgaria in 1875, and, on top of the horror, indignation at the calm with which the Government and most people in England heard what had happened. To a good many Englishmen it seemed only decent to be anti-Russian ; one was anti-Russian as one was anti-eating one's grandmother or anti-shooting foxes. The Queen was anti-Russian because that had been her late husband's attitude, and she now became hysterically so. Lord Beaconsfield was anti-Russian because the prestige of Britain seemed to require a pro-Turk policy ; but he did not want war. Nor was all the high ethical argument against him. Swinburne, for instance, was hotly anti-Russian on the grounds that the waxing evil was greater than the waning.

Though the Tsar Nicholas would rather not have acted independently against the Turks, he

had made up his mind to succour the Christians in Turkey, and when the other Powers showed that they were not going to move, he sent his troops over the frontier. Immediately a war party sprang up in England, under the spiritual patronage of the Queen, who, more than once, went so far as to threaten abdication—"she feels," she wrote to her Prime Minister, "she cannot . . . remain the Sovereign of a country that is letting itself down to kiss the feet of the great barbarians." Even these threats, and even her direct commands did not prevail on the Cabinet to make war.

For a long time, however, war seemed an imminent danger, and while the crisis lasted the E.Q.A. struggled to show that it would be a monstrous injustice if the country were to be drawn in on the Turkish side. And if most of the anti-Russians were typical in their hidebound chauvinism, the resistance to them by a body of liberal-minded men of all classes—from Lord Shaftesbury and the Duke of Westminster down to Morris's new workmen friends—who tried to see the position impartially, was typical too; an aspect of the greatness of England that the Queen, however, did not appreciate. When the anti-Turks began to hold meetings she wanted the Attorney-General to prosecute them.

The retiring Burne-Jones himself marched round Hyde Park in the name of what he trusted was justice, and Ruskin wrote from Italy: "I hope neither Morris nor you will retire wholly

again out of such spheres of effort. It seems to me especially a time when the quietest men should be disquieted and the meekest self-asserting." Ned was too delicate to persevere, and if Morris henceforward asserted himself more and more it was from no love of that kind of prominence ; he hated meetings, he hated having to speak.

With Morris the imperialist argument for keeping Russia out of Constantinople cut no ice. Imperialism was one of the expressions of modern civilisation that he thought most wicked and foolish. He told Watts-Dunton plainly that in his opinion "Australia ought to have been left to the blacks, New Zealand to the Maoris, and South Africa to the Kaffirs." Moreover, the Russians did not seem to him to be inherently incapable of doing right. He commented on how unfair it was that so little credit had been allowed them in England when they had freed their serfs, and he regarded their present campaign as just.

But now supposing England did fight a war for Turkey, and won : "What," he asked, "should we do with Turkey if we didn't wish to be damned ?" Rule the country ourselves ? "I know," he wrote furiously, "what the stock-jobbing scoundrel that one calls an Englishman to-day would do with it : he would shut his eyes hard over it, get his widows and orphans to lend it money, and sell it vast quantities of bad cotton."

As the weeks passed, Morris's latent demo-

cratic feeling, nourished by his growing sense of the callousness of various vested interests to which the privileged putrescence of the Sublime Porte was not disagreeable, declared itself. Its development was all the quicker because of his disgust with the timidity of the Liberals. Ten years before, William Rossetti had noted with surprise : " I find that Morris takes much more interest in politics than I had any notion of, and that his views are quite in harmony with the democratic sympathies of Jones, Swinburne, myself, etc." (March 1866). And now, in May 1877, came his manifesto headed : " To the Working Men of England," and the die was cast.

" Who are they that are leading us into war ? Greedy gamblers on the Stock Exchange, idle officers of the Army and Navy (poor fellows !), worn-out mockers of the clubs, desperate purveyors of exciting war news for the comfortable breakfast-tables of those who have nothing to lose by war.

" Working men of England, one word of warning yet : I doubt if you know the bitterness of hatred against freedom and progress that lies at the hearts of a certain part of the richer classes in this country. . . . These men cannot speak of your order, of its aims, of its leaders, without a sneer or an insult : these men if they had the power (may England perish rather !) would thwart your just aspirations, would silence you, would deliver you bound hand and foot for ever to irresponsible capital. . . ."

If, he went on, they had any hopes of justice, of greater equality between man and man, and of more leisure in which to improve themselves, then they must "cast aside sloth and cry out against an Unjust War, and urge us of the Middle Classes to do no less."

Thus one thing led to another, and now the issues of war and peace in the world seemed to Morris inextricably interrelated. It was a logic that did not equally convince all his friends. De Morgan, who had been quite ready to follow Morris's lead in the matter of neutrality, was disconcerted, a little later on, when he found that "an honest objection to Bulgarian atrocities had been held to be one and the same thing as sympathy with Karl Marx, and that Morris took it for granted that I should be ready for enrolment with Hyndman and Co.!"

The Russians behaved, in a political sense, with moderation, in spite of having had considerable difficulty in beating the Turks; and they made peace at San Stefano without entering Constantinople. There next took place the Berlin Conference, at which, as the Duke of Argyll put it, our great object was to get "for Europe as a whole as much as possible of the authority and of the credit, of results which had been won by Russia alone." This was Beaconsfield's "Peace with Honour"; and the British fire-eaters had meanwhile been compensated for their missed opportunity in the Balkans by war in Afghanistan. Morris had

again worked hard on a committee—Lord Lawrence's—to try to help to prevent it.

The E.Q.A. had broken up before this amidst bickerings. "There was a stormy meeting of the E.Q.A. yesterday," Morris wrote on the 20th February 1878, "full of wretched little personalities, but I held my tongue—I am out of it now ; I mean as to bothering my head about it ; I shall give up reading the papers and shall stick to my work." To give up reading the papers and to stick to one's work—excellent general principles !

But for Morris easier said than done. More than ever was going on in the Company's workshops, and yet Morris was never again to lead his former life of a craftsman with poetry for a sub-trade. His labours on behalf of the E.Q.A. had brought him in touch with working men and their leaders. His sympathy for the common arts and crafts and the necessary toil on which life is supported had always been ample to embrace as well the common men by the sweat of whose brows these things have to be carried on. He had from the start been all the more drawn to them because he realised so painfully what bad work they were made to do, and under what bad conditions, and how in many cases they had only a precarious tenure of their livelihood. Now at last he was getting to know the men themselves.

At this point the question : How ought a man to live ? no longer seemed very puzzling to him ;

the immediate practical one for which he wanted an answer was : What is the next step ?

His natural impulse was to try help educate the working classes. On 4th December 1877 he had given his first lecture, to Professor Warr's Trade Guild of Learning. Warr " had got Lord Rosebery to preside over the Guild, but he could not get the young carpenter and stonemason to school." Still, a beginning had to be made somehow ; George Wardle dated Morris's active Socialism from the connection with Warr.

About the same year Morris had thoughts of starting profit-sharing in Morris & Co., and he is said to have gone no farther with the scheme only because he was appalled by the amount of book-keeping he realised it would involve. The question was to crop up again about six years later.

### III

In 1876 the Morrises house-hunted in London for the last time. Jane would have been satisfied with any reasonable modern house that had the usual conveniences, and Morris must have been anxious to anticipate criticism of his particularity, because he wrote to her very tactfully : " I don't think either you or I could stand a quite modern house in a street say at Notting Hill Gate : I don't fancy going back to the bugs of Bloomsbury . . . and it would not do for either of us to go into a house which one or the other would pray for an earthquake to knock it down." One does

not have to be a distinguished æsthete to know how he felt about it : " At the risk," he went on, " of being considered self-seeking I must say that in the ordinary Cromwell-Road-sort-of-house I should be so hipped that I should be no use to anybody."

No one with a heart can fail to be grateful that so many people who have to live in a house in a street do not specially mind, or if they begin by minding, so soon get acclimatised to ordered drabness. But it is still more a matter for gratitude that a few poets and others are proof against conditioning, and keep alive, at the price of tortured sensibilities if needs be, knowledge of the difference between beauty and ugliness. Whoever does not love beauty, and harmony, and peace, with a certain passion, cannot conceive how desolating it would have been for Morris if every morning when he got up in his own home he had looked through a window and seen the back of a long row of houses, with smoke-grimed conservatories sticking out of them, or at the front of any average Victorian street, plastered about with dead vestiges of the classical orders, or huge and stupid, with the air of a series of great stucco decimals recurring *ad infinitum*.

The big, homely, Georgian house that he took in the end at Upper Mall, Hammersmith, suited well enough. It had a long garden at the back, and in front there was nothing between it and the Thames but a narrow road, planted with elms and closed to vehicular traffic. Its name was

changed from The Retreat—Morris to Jane: "People would think there was nothing amiss with me"—to Kelmscott House. The family now had the delightful prospect before them of being able to get into a boat by their London doorstep, and sail a hundred and thirty miles upstream right to the banks of their little domain of Kelmscott Manor.

No doubt the chief feature of the new house was the long drawing-room, which had all its five windows giving on to the river. It was soon to be hung with the blue Morris & Co. Bird tapestries, and of course was never filled up in the Victorian way with miscellaneous ornaments; there were just the tiles inside the fireplace, and some china, and a few not too precious bluish Oriental rugs under foot. The general effect on some people was of dignified restfulness, and on others of a garden-like freshness; it was certainly, with the old overtopping settees and those close-knit patterns on the wall, very Morris. The style was a personal one, but not unaccommodating: for instance, far more eclectic than the characteristic style of to-day, which is intolerant of the whole of the furniture and decoration of the past.

Pictures were not admitted in the drawing-room. In the dining-room, which had the Acanthus wall-paper and a Persian carpet hung up like a canopy from the level of the second-floor ceiling (the ceiling of this room having been removed), there were drawings of Jenny and

May, and over the mantelpiece a portrait of Jane, all three by Rossetti. Morris's study on the ground floor had no carpet or hangings. The furniture, table, chairs, and bookshelves, was of unpolished oak: a chastity that was fully compensated by the room's remarkable untidiness—papers, ink, brushes, saucers of Chinese white, books, designs, pins, rulers, lay about everywhere. But there was always place on the table for a jar of Latakia, and friends coming to see Morris would be offered, besides the tobacco, their choice of pipe—cherry-wood, briar, or clay.

Morris had a tapestry loom built into his bedroom; so now after thirty years there was, so to speak, netting *in excelsis* for the Old Marlburian. At the same time the coach-house and stable were turned into a weaving-room, and here the firm produced the first hand-woven carpets made in England since the decay of the art at the beginning of the century. When Morris had got to know all about the weaving from A to Z, he went back a step and designed the looms.

Another of the "of courses" about the house was: no gas laid on. Lighting was by candles in handsome brass and copper candlesticks. It was all as little mechanised, modernised, or haphazard as it could be, and for the London home of this particular family ideal, one would say.

But though when indoors and at work Morris was content here, he had only to set foot in the garden to be reminded of Lechdale, the clean

pearly grey house and fresh green meadows that he loved so much. What was this London garden but "soot and old boots" ?

And what, he asked himself from time to time, was all this art-work and effort and bothering about decorating houses but a great weariness of the flesh ? More than once he confessed that what would please him would be to live in a room where "one talked with one's friends in one corner and ate in another and slept in another and worked in another."

Still, he dearly loved his country home. He suffered very much, in the early days at Kelmscott House, from a gloomy foreboding that among the renunciations he would have to make the better to fulfil his destiny, was the other, the real Kelmscott. He knew that without sacrifices he would not be able to do all the social work he felt called to undertake, over and above carrying on the business of the firm, which was his livelihood. The thought of losing Kelmscott would have struck his heart with panic if he had not now been fortified by a positive sense of his mission, and prepared by his spiritual training to give up as much of his happiness as necessary for the happiness of his fellow-men.

One obvious consideration was money : would he be able to afford to keep on Kelmscott ? He had long ago exercised his privilege of paying in cash for the furtherance of ideals. He foresaw that after literature (the Mag.) and handi-

craft (the Co.) it would be the turn of Socialism to become a charge on his income, if not a levy on his capital.

There was another consideration, a more immaterial one. He wrote from Kelmscott: "I have been chastened by many thoughts and the beauty and quietness of the surroundings, which latter, as I hinted, I am, as it were, beginning to take leave of. That leave-taking will, I confess, though you may think it fantastic, seem a long step towards saying good-bye to the world." What was in his mind? Perhaps a grave consciousness of sub-human forces, as well as the hosts of the less lovingkind sort of men being pitted against him?

The enemy had drawn blood before this. They had aimed and hit at the weakest joint of his susceptibilities. His beautiful, promising elder child, his darling Jenny, had lately been taken ill. Her disease was of the mind. She never fully recovered. To Morris, loving her more tenderly than ever, this was for the rest of his life a grief that shadowed his happiness, and sometimes clouded his whole toilsome day.

By good luck Kelmscott had not to be given up for reasons of money, nor did Morris's strategy in the spiritual fight require its abandonment.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### I

THE die was cast, but till 1881 there was no Socialist party to join, and Morris did not join it—Hyndman's Democratic Federation—till January 1883. Before this he still had occasional hopes of the Liberals making a progressive move.

In 1880 Burne-Jones described his dear friend in a letter to Norton as unchanged: “. . . little grey tips to his curly wig—no more; not quite so stout; not one hair less on his head, buttons off more than formerly, never any neck-tie—more eager if anything than ever, but just about the same things: a rock of defence to us all. . . .”

Burne-Jones approved of the eagerness, even of the eagerness of indignation with bad social conditions, always without facing the possibility that Morris might one day feel obliged to become an active kind of Marxian and colleague of Hyndman. In the meantime Morris's decorative work, lecturing, and Antiscrape propaganda were all being pursued with such vigour that his friends were hardly prepared for the step he was about to take.

The firm had not been making its Hammer-smith carpets long before Morris took over the

shell of a decayed silk factory and its grounds at Merton Abbey, on the Wandle, and transferred there his looms from Upper Mall stables, and all the plant from Queen Square, which was now evacuated. In the same year, 1881, he began to turn out his famous printed cottons, and in due course also printed velvets. In 1882 William de Morgan removed his kilns from Chelsea and set them up at Merton.

The S.P.A.B. was alert for signs of vandalism. Urged on by Morris it even brought pressure to bear on a foreign Government—with success. The western façade of St. Mark's, Venice, was saved from demolition, after a signature for a petition had been wrung out of Lord Beaconsfield, and out of Burne-Jones the first and last public speech he ever made. Though there was some annoyance in Italy at this intervention by an English society, there was considerably less than if Ruskin had not tactfully managed to let what credit there was in the affair seem to attach to Count Zorzi, a native of Venice.

Since his address on "The Lesser Arts" to Warr's Guild in December 1877, Morris had become a recognised lecturer. On that first occasion he had been nervous. Before the performance he took Wardle to the hall and read *Robinson Crusoe* to him to see if he could make his voice heard. He was not naturally a good extempore speaker; an impressive one he could not help being. He observed: "I have only one thing to say and have to find divers ways of

saying it," but that one thing could not be put into two words ; it was a philosophy that touched life at all points.

He went on lecturing without finding the business get much easier. " I know what I want to say but the cursed words go to water between my fingers." In reality he said what he wanted with the utmost clearness. His lectures were vivacious, and positive, and besprinkled with memorably well-turned phrases.

What Burne-Jones had begun to fear came to pass on the day that he and Morris heard they had been made Honorary Fellows of their old college. Morris joined the Democratic Federation. His membership card, signed by Henry Champion, was inscribed : " William Morris, designer." He later confessed that " when I took that step I was blankly ignorant of economics ; I had never so much as opened Adam Smith, or heard of Ricardo or Karl Marx." But he had read Mill's posthumous papers against Socialism—and they had converted him to it.

There was a lunch party at Gatti's to talk things over with Hyndman. Very earnestly Morris, in his manner, swore allegiance. It was like an echo from the past, a quotation from a forgotten letter Topsy had once written to his mother. He assured Hyndman he was ready to do whatever he was told. He would obey orders. One young man who was of the party, and is alive now, remembers being amused " by this announcement from an obviously

ungovernable man who was too big to be led by any of us." Not that there was any question, that day, of Morris being asked to follow the lead of Mr. Bernard Shaw!

Morris wrote to Allingham in April: "Yes, I am a rebel, and even more of a rebel than some of my coadjutors know perhaps. . . . Certainly in some way or other this present society, or age of shoddy, is doomed to fail: nor can I see anything ahead of it as an organisation save Socialism: meantime as to the present parties I say—damn tweedledum and blast tweedledee."

His coadjutors could not long have been left in doubt of his fervent rebelliousness, and most of his friends, and that part of the general public that was interested in him as a famous poet who had taken the eccentric step of enrolling with Hyndman, had their last illusions dispelled in November, when Morris declared himself in unmistakable terms at a lecture he gave in Oxford.

The Russell Club had invited him to speak on Art under Democracy, and the Master of the University had lent the College hall for the occasion. At first the plan had been to get Hyndman as well, but then it was felt that he was too violent a revolutionary for it to be right and decent to offer him an Oxford platform. When Morris heard of these hesitations he wrote to Faulkner, whose college University was, asking him to make it quite clear to the Master that he was "an officer of the same Association" as

Hyndman, and that he meant distinctly to "lecture as a delegate from it." He was prepared to swear that Hyndman had not horns or hoofs: and he added: "Neither (as Secretary of the S.P.A.B.) will I allow him to blow up any *old* buildings in Oxford."

Hyndman was definitely off; but the authorities could still not believe that a gentleman, poet, and man of means could be a real Socialist like the rest; could not believe that he was lacking in class-consciousness—an attitude of mind that even Marx's bitterest critics cannot accuse him of having invented for the special purpose of hardening the proletarian will. So on the evening of 14th November Morris got up to speak, with Ruskin taking the chair for his Rustic-Russet and Surly-Burly Carle, and Dr. Bright, the Master, present among a large audience.

The fat was not at once in the fire. Morris began by asking his hearers to extend the meaning of the word "art" till it embraced "the aspect of all the externals of our life." There was nothing startling in this. He then dwelt on the decay of popular art, for which he made "the present system of society" responsible: this and many other evils were inseparable from competition, which, between man and man, "is bestial only."

"I am," he said, "one of the people called Socialists. . . ." This was not news to Dr. Bright: no need yet for anxiety. And what the

lecturer said he believed in was association, the opposite of competition. He looked forward to conditions under which men could enjoy their work, declaring that the result of this pleasure in making things would be a renaissance of popular art, since ART IS MAN'S EXPRESSION OF HIS JOY IN LABOUR: "if those are not Professor Ruskin's words, they embody at least his teaching on this subject."

So far still so good. A very proper, quite conventionally correct tribute to the eminent chairman.

Next Morris sketched the growth of commerce. If its present kind of development were ever carried to its logical conclusion, the skilled workman would cease to exist, his place being taken by "machines directed by a few highly trained and very intelligent experts." Machines were not really being used to save labour, but to make more and more profits: "The phrase labour-saving machinery is elliptical, and means machinery which saves the cost of labour, not the labour itself, which will be expended when saved on tending other machines."

In very polite language he denied the adequacy of current Liberal ideals, amplifying the question he asked more brusquely elsewhere: "Is it all to end in a counting-house on the top of a cinder heap, with Podsnap's drawing-room in the office, and a Whig committee dealing out champagne to the rich and margarine to the poor?" He submitted that the country was no nearer to the

ideal of a bourgeois commonwealth than it had been at the time of the Reform Bill.

Statistics were most misleading. He begged his hearers not to hide their heads from reality in statistics—while strong men in thousands waited every day for the chance of a job at the dock gates, and while over the greater part of England the weekly wage of a farm labourer was ten shillings. He grew perceptibly ruder. Average incomes, indeed! “Why not take in everybody” (into the calculation of average wealth) “from the Duke of Westminster downwards, and then raise a hymn of rejoicing over the income of the English people?”

He was bitter when he spoke of poverty and wage-slavery.

Then he made his appeal. He invited the audience “to renounce their class pretensions and cast in their lot with the working men. . . . Since I am a member of a Socialist propaganda I earnestly beg those of you who agree with me to help us actively. . . . Do not hold aloof from us. . . . Help us now, you whom the fortune of your birth has helped to make wise and refined . . . organised brotherhood is that which must break the spell of anarchical Plutocracy.”

Half a minute later he ended. Dr. Bright at once rose to his feet and protested. This was not what Morris had been asked to come and do—to try to make converts to Socialism. This was not a lecture on Art under a Democracy, a subject

with which, said the Master—remembering amid his consternation to be gracious—Mr. Morris was “unusually well acquainted.”

Then Dr. Bright, who stammered a little, found the rest of what he wanted to say stick in his throat. He sat down, “leaving his remonstrance incomplete, but thoroughly indicated.” Every one felt extremely embarrassed. Thereupon, fortunately for all concerned, Ruskin got up, and, according to one who was present, “with the most exquisite tact soothed all our nerves. What he said I have not the least recollection, but he said precisely the right thing.”

As for the lecture, it has been reprinted under the appropriate title of *Art under Plutocracy*. From the evening Morris spoke it in his attempt to make Oxford the home of a cause not yet won, he was at last generally recognised to be just as much a Socialist as his colleagues. What a surprise !

## II

It has become hard to realise how unrespectable Morris's step appeared in the early 'eighties to people of his own class, partly because distinctions have become less sharp in the meantime, and partly because, of the nine points in the Socialist programme, only one any longer seems revolutionary.

Morris lost no personal friends as a result of his conversion, but though he was not a man to be chilled into fear by the blasts of criticism he

now had to face from strange quarters, it must not be supposed that he was insensitive to them. He felt that his actions were in a way symbolic, and concerned the public as much as the public thought they did, so his concern was, after making quite sure for the sake of his own conscience that he was justified, to find words and arguments to persuade others of it ; and it is often very hard to give an account of, or even to remember accurately, the path by which one has arrived at a certain position.

Burne-Jones was never persuaded. He sadly felt that Morris had touched pitch and was being defiled. " A parenthesis," he called his friend's Socialism. But long afterwards he said of his refusal to sympathise and follow : " The only time when I failed Morris."

The nine points in Hyndman's programme were : 1. Universal Suffrage. 2. Triennial Parliaments. 3. Equal Electoral Divisions. 4. Payment of Members. 5. Corruption of Electors to be made a criminal offence. 6. Abolition of the House of Lords as a Legislative body. 7. Home Rule for Ireland. 8. Self-government for the Colonies. 9. Nationalisation of Land. This last was the only Socialist item, and Morris was a good deal more in sympathy with it and the three points preceding it than with the first five. He was inclined to damn and blast a parliamentary Labour Party even more than tweedledum and tweedledee. This was chiefly why, after little more than a year, he led the

secession from the Federation and helped to create the Socialist League.

However, he agreed with Hyndman about what social measures were most urgently needed, and here again the points—eight this time—do not on the whole look so very subversive fifty years after they were formulated, since four of them have meanwhile been accepted by the community, and we have got used to hearing arguments in favour of the rest. We have our eight-hour day, our graduated income-tax, our universal education, and at last even our housing schemes. Perhaps Morris had not got a quite clear idea of how the nationalising of the banks—one of the other points—would work, but he could see with his own eyes what hardships private enterprise meant for the many thousands of men whom the current capitalist system offered no chance of a secure livelihood. He had become a Socialist at a time when no intelligent, well-informed person could any longer doubt that slumps were a heavy price to pay for booms. In 1884, for instance, there was a sudden crisis in the shipyards. Whole towns on the north-east coast were thrown into destitution for no more weird or unnatural reason than that too many ships had been built, competitively, in the years preceding.

Morris did not have to understand Marx's economic theories in detail in order to see that this was a bad, typical state of affairs. But in these days he loyally pored and agonised over

*Capital*—"stiffer reading," he confessed, "than some of Browning's poetry." On his first visit to Glasgow the Secretary of the newly formed Socialist group there, Nairne, deliberately to embarrass him, asked: "Does Comrade Morris accept Marx's theory of value?" Comrade Morris answered: "I am asked if I believe in Marx's theory of value. To speak quite frankly, I do not know what Marx's theory of value is, and I'm damned if I want to know."

Admissions like this one, and the obviously rather unusual tone of his Socialist propaganda, have encouraged some commentators to make such remarks as that his new politics came from "an entirely æsthetic impulse," the intention being to suggest that he was therefore not really a Socialist at all, but only an artist errant and erring. When is a Socialist a Socialist? Only when he believes his politics are mathematically demonstrable? Or when he is biased by weariness with a sordid lot? Morris's impulse was not entirely æsthetic. What in his own day confused would-be apologists for his conduct was that, knowing what life could be like, and *should*, he believed, be like, enabled him to use not only the language of theory when he talked and wrote for his cause, but also the language of prophecy, charging it with much of the human sort of emotion that politics generally lack—other, of course, than angry feelings.

Whether Morris was a real Socialist or not must be judged from his actions. He gave up his time and his strength for Socialism. He gave

up his respectability. He preached at street corners in wind and rain. He sold valuable books from his library to make up the deficit incurred by *Justice*, the S.D.F. weekly paper, for which he wrote many articles. He, a man of fifty, an eminent poet and artist, stood selling copies of *Justice* in the gutter—making an exhibition of himself. He also, who suffered fools so little gladly, suffered the foolishness of working-class comrades with the patience of Job.

His normal week now (1884) included the following activities in addition to the daily work for a living : writing for *Justice*, bill-posting, and selling the paper, orating—"the pernicious practice of what may be called professional agitation"—then attendance on Mondays at the Council meeting of the Federation, on Tuesdays at the Publishing Committee, on Thursdays at the Ways and Means Committee ; while on Fridays he was organising the Hammersmith Branch of the Federation, and on Sundays, the busiest of all days, arranging concerts and conferences, and excursions for poor children.

Some weeks there was much travelling about the country lecturing. Often he was in pain with gout, which occasionally made him "leg-fast." January 1884 : "I am going to lecture at Hampstead to-night and to-morrow at Blackheath. . . . On Monday I go to Manchester and lecture at Ancoats, the working suburb, and in the middle of the town to respectability on the Tuesday : on Wednesday I lecture at Leicester. . . ." In

February he had been lecturing to "respectability" at Bradford when he wrote home about the mill children that they "go to the mill at ten years old for five hours a day as half-timers: I don't think all my vigorous words (of a nature that you may imagine) shook the conviction of my entertainers that this was the way to make an Earthly Paradise." Does this sound like an "entirely æsthetic impulse?" On the 14th March, anniversary of the death of Marx, he walked in a procession from Tottenham Court Road to Highgate Cemetery with a red ribbon in his button-hole. When they got to the cemetery they were turned away by the police.

### III

There is nothing odd in poets being democratic. When they have been out in the world rubbing shoulders with men and women of all sorts it is hard for them, on coming home, and even when they have had a bath and feel clean and secure, to start all over again making nice conventional distinctions, and patronising people who are no longer beyond the pale of their understanding. Or, if their excursions are up to the skies, they seem on their return to recognise that between the heavenly hierarchy of archoi, and archangels, and angels, and the earthly one of lords, commons, and outcasts, or the nabobs and the Social Problem Group, there is no parallel or analogy. Our human categories seem to need amendment.

Then besides, the poet is often a modest fellow who could live on little, but finds that little denied him because he cannot earn enough from the sale of his wares. He probably feels that poetry is as necessary for people as automatic lighters, and the other gadgets from which the happy inventors make enough money to live on more than a little. So free competition comes to disgust him, and he turns Socialist (by that or another name).

Without being quite that kind of modest fellow, Morris arrived at the conclusions he would have done if he had been. It struck him as absurd that a man without money or employment should be able to solve his difficulties if he could invent something which—however useless or even harmful it was—people could be persuaded to buy, whereas he must remain destitute if he merely kept quiet and made lettuces grow on a piece of waste ground.

Tennyson was not that kind of modest fellow either, but he did not, like Morris, incline to democracy because of what he saw going on around him. One evening in December 1884 Allingham broached the topic of Morris's Socialism.

"He's gone crazy," said Tennyson. Allingham answered that he agreed with many of Morris's ideas. "Labour does not get its fair share."

Tennyson: "There's brain labour as well as hand labour."

Allingham: "And there are many who get money without labour. The question, how to hinder money from accumulating into lumps is a puzzling one."

Tennyson: "You must let a man leave money to his children. I was once in a coffee-shop in the Westminster Road at four o'clock in the morning. A man was raging: 'Why has So-and-So got a hundred pounds and I haven't got a shilling?' I said to him, 'If your father had left you a hundred pounds you wouldn't give it to somebody else.' He hadn't a word to answer. I knew he hadn't."

This illuminating anecdote did not influence Allingham to go back on his sympathy for Morris, who by the way had come to think Tennyson rather a philistine. According to Morris the Poet Laureate's technique of looking at a picture was to go up to it and growl: "What's that?" On being told: "A man," he would ask: "What's he doing?"—and, in short, try to make nonsense of the painter's work. Morris was saving up a little taunt for his old hero. . . .

Allingham believed there was something unfair about the arrangement of society; and what struck Morris as a terrible possibility was that poor people who led toilsome and ugly lives should not fully realise this unfairness of their plight, and should accept it too resignedly: he felt that would be harbouring the most perverting of lies in the soul. That was why he set out "to make Socialists." That was why he preached

discontent. The loss of the sense of beauty, due largely to the ruin of the arts and crafts by machinery, was a deformity of modern life that had been worrying him from youth up, but he also hated quite as much as any simple philanthropist to know that children of tender years were being made to work in factories, and that grown men—no mitigation that they were legally “free”—had to earn dangerous livings for not much pay at the bottom of coal mines. Morris even heartily wished that the community would contrive to dispense with coal, and no one who knew him could ever have doubted that, if a move in this direction had been made, he would gladly have spent the cold months of the year wrapped up in skins.

The experience of the Democratic Federation in 1883 and 1884 showed that there was also a *political* need for making Socialists. The Radical working men's clubs were not enthusiastic about joining. The Trade Unions seemed content to combine for the limited objective of getting wages raised. Agitation was not being very successful; the Unions had degenerated, as John Burns could still write of them three years later, “into mere middle and upper class rate-reducing institutions.”

Every year was bringing its special difficulties and trials. It was in 1884 that Morris's more conservative friends found him most unequable, hardly willing to listen to their points of view. In the earlier months he was still on

the defensive, entrenching himself against the attacks following the revelations of the Oxford lecture. In March he was perturbed by the quarrels which had broken out inside the Federation and were very acrimonious ; it was a great worry when the boiling blood of comrades seemed to be making a split inevitable. When it came, Morris was one of the leaders of the secession. He wrote bitterly " I don't think intrigue and ambition are among my many faults, but here I am, driven to thrusting myself forward and making a party within a party."

What really was it that drove him ? He certainly resented Hyndman's occasionally dictatorial manners, and the rage with which he fell upon Andreas Scheu, the Austrian cabinet-maker who had founded the Scottish branch of the Federation, when they had disagreed over a small matter of a name. He was also indignant with Hyndham for being ready to take Conservative money for putting up his parliamentary candidates. But when the League was formed there was nothing in its articles unacceptable to the conscience of a parliament man wanting to join. Could there, then, have been something in Hyndman's odd allegation that " the influence which brought about the split at the end of 1884 was the malignant lying of a despicable married woman . . . on a purely domestic question ? "

The League was a remarkable body. It contained Owenites, Chartists, and Co-operators ; Parliamentary Socialists headed by Frederick

Engels ; Anarchists like Kitz ; Belfort Bax ; Dr. Aveling and his wife Eleanor, the daughter of Karl Marx ; and Morris and his friends Webb and Faulkner. It would have been hard, according to Mr. Beer, the historian of British Socialism, to find a group "which exhibited so much talent and self-sacrifice, and at the same time so little organising and executive ability."

Morris had no monopoly of the first two qualities, though certainly more than an average share of energy for exercising them, and apart from doing so in all matters of propaganda he took on himself a quite disproportionate responsibility in setting the League physically, so to speak, on its feet. It was he that went out and hired offices, "very humble quarters," and had them furnished with some Windsor chairs and a table. "So there I am, really once more like a young bear with all my troubles before me."

And once more there was a kind of Mag. to start and write for, though not before the debts of *Justice* had been paid. This time it was *The Commonweal*, and he was one of its editors as long as his connection with the League lasted—a necessary precaution, in view of the extremist nature of the contributions that were likely to be sent in. There were to appear in this curious paper, the circulation of which during Morris's editorship never surpassed a few hundred, two serials, which are two of the most beautiful books in English literature.

The first number came out in February 1885.

It contained a poem by Morris, set to the tune of "John Brown's Body," and called "The March of the Workers." This begins :

"What is this, the sound and rumour ? What is this that all men hear ?

Like the wind in hollow valleys when the storm is drawing near,

Like the rolling of the ocean in the eventide of fear !

'Tis the people marching on."

After every two stanzas comes the chorus :

"Hark the rolling of the thunder !

Lo, the sun ! and lo, thereunder

Riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder,

And the host comes marching on."

It was the fifth of the many songs Morris wrote for the Socialist cause, and the one most frequently sung, we are told by Glasier, who praises its "Socialist distinctiveness" while confessing that "the tune itself is too much inclined to run into a rant for the impressiveness of the words." A rant : is there not something ranting about the words as well ? And about all these half-exasperated, three-eighths fanatical and one-eighth apocalyptic chants of Morris's ?

Certainly there is ; and "Let the rich man tremble" is not much better than "Let cowards flinch and traitors sneer," which Glasier disapproved in "The Red Flag." Yet the chants are substantial. They have a solid Victorian mahogany worth. They were made up (it should not be forgotten) to give heart to poor, not well-educated people, and in most of them there is

enough of the nobility inseparable from Morris for them to have raised the tone as well as the hopes of their begetters. This also must be said of Morris's worst lapses: the rich man was adjured to tremble for his riches, not for his life or share of freedom.

Morris formed a Hammersmith Branch of the League, and turned the Kelmscott House stables, now empty of looms, into its headquarters. It was the arrest of a member of this Branch that led to the chief sensation of 1885 both for British Socialism and for Morris himself.

The Federation and the League had been holding meetings in the East End which were not particularly well attended till, in September, the police interfered with one of the Socialist speakers. The neighbourhood at once conceived a sporting interest in what the future held out in the way of clashes, sympathy being definitely with the propagandists.

The trouble was not long in coming. One Sunday at Dod Street the police, on making a dash for some Socialists speaking from a cart, were obstructed and jeered at by the crowd. Eight men were arrested, one of whom was a comrade from the Hammersmith Branch.

When he, with the other seven, was brought up before the magistrate, Morris was present in court. The magistrate, Mr. Saunders, having delivered himself of some general remarks, sentenced one prisoner to two months' hard labour, and fined the rest.



*[Reproduced by courtesy of Messrs Morris & Co]*

MERTON ABBEY

At this there was an uproar: cries of "Shame!" hoots and hisses. Then, according to Morris, "the police simply hustled me and others out with shoves and pushes; when I got to the door I turned round and expostulated with the policeman for his shoving, and the beggar immediately collared me and swore I had hit him and had broken his helmet. . . ." Result: Morris himself now stood before Mr. Saunders, and the following dialogue took place.

Mr. Saunders: "What are you?"

Morris: "I am an artist and a literary man, pretty well known, I think, throughout Europe."

Mr. Saunders: "I suppose you did not intend to do this?"

Morris: "I never struck him at all."

Mr. Saunders: "Well, I will let you go."

Morris: "But I have not done anything."

Mr. Saunders: "Well, you can stay if you like."

Morris: "I don't want to stay."

He was discharged. Afterwards he was sorry for having added to his description of himself as an artist and literary man what he did add. "It's the only time I've had to bounce about myself, and I'll never do it again."

Out of evil, from the point of view of the League and the Federation, came good—temporarily. Large numbers of people suddenly grew afraid that free speech was being threatened; there were angry letters to the papers about the behaviour of the police; a huge Radical meeting was promptly held at Dod Street; and the

League found itself quite popular—the champion of an important liberty.

But all that came to an end as soon as the 8th February 1886, “Black Monday,” when a procession of unemployed turned into a riot, broke windows in many streets in the West End, and shouted out rude words at members of the Carlton and Thatched House Clubs. The great distress of the poor aroused the great fear of the well-to-do. A nobleman who lived on Campden Hill wrote to the papers that he was going to fortify his house and arm his servants with Winchester repeaters. Hyndman, John Burns, and two other Socialists were arrested and tried for sedition, and, though they were acquitted, middle-class feeling continued to run high against Socialism. Burne-Jones was afraid that Morris would get into serious trouble.

Morris promised to be careful. In one letter to Ned he wrote: “If you had only suffered as I have from the apathy of the English lower classes (woe’s me how low!) you would rejoice at their awakening, however ugly the form it took.” The great thing, in fact, was still to make Socialists, to give working men (this is what it amounted to) a wider and more human outlook, a policy for life as well as for wages.

#### IV

Some of his Socialist-making must have been unique in demagoguery. He had a good deal of

success in Glasgow, where there was some difference of opinion between the young people and their elders as to the dignity of his presence. On one occasion as he walked with this Socialist friend and host, Bruce Glasier, through the slums at the foot of High Street, the gutter-snipes ran after him with cries of "Buffalo Bill!" "Holy Moses!" and "Run and lock the park gates, Jamie!" and a small boy came up respectfully and said: "You'll find one just over the way, sir."

"Find what, my little man?" asked Morris.

"A hairdresser, sir!"

And so to Jail Square by Glasgow Green, followed by more children singing:

"Sailor, sailor, sou'west!  
Dance a jig in a crow's nest!"

All this Morris took with perfect good humour; the only pity was, he said to Glasier, that these amusing cheeky children so soon grew out of their fun, and became dull and vacant-minded under the pressure of their hard lot. When they got to the place near the park railings that was the Trafalgar Square of Glasgow, Curran, afterwards a Labour M.P., broke off from a speech he was making and said that the author of *The Earthly Paradise* would now address the meeting.

Morris got up on the stool—the famous poet, or a famous poet: the bystanders were interested. Soon there was quite a large audience, and they listened to Morris attentively for twenty minutes.

He was in a grave, reasonable mood (There had been some swearing as he passed the cathedral: "I've seen enough of the depredations of your cathedral blockheads!" etc.). He talked about the dismal prospects in life of the kind of slum children who had just now been running after him with their japes. The sharp contrast between wealth and poverty was very wrong, and it was the aim of Socialism, he said, to correct this evil. He congratulated the Glasgow working men on having preserved freedom of speech in their city.

He may not have told the crowd much they did not know, but moral support from a gentleman and famous poet must have eased the tension of mind of some of his more earnest listeners, who, though they know that their grievances were real enough, could hardly have helped allowing an uncomfortable deal of credit to the middle-class point of view.

There was also the effect of Morris's presence to be taken into account. This was the impression Bruce Glasier had first got of him eighteen months before, in December 1884, in a dingy meet-hall in Glasgow. "When he entered the room . . . I knew at once it was he. No one else could be like that. There he was, a sun-god, truly, in his ever afterwards familiar blue serge jacket, and lighter blue cotton shirt and collar (without scarf or tie), and with the grandest head I had ever seen on the shoulders of a man. A kind of glow seemed to be about him. . . ."

Many other people were impressed by Morris much in this way, though they did not find words to say so.

And now that he had finished speaking some one said: "In one of the evening papers last night you are described as a rich man. Are you willing to submit to a general division of riches?"

Morris answered: "I am not quite a rich man, as rich men go nowadays, but I am richer than I ought to be compared with the mass of my fellows; or rather I shall say they are poorer than they ought to be. I am more than willing that my riches, such as they are, should be put into the common stock of the nation; and I shall rejoice to work for the community, and give it the benefit of whatever talent or skill I possess, for the same wages that I demand for, and that the nation could afford to pay, under a proper economic and moral system, to every worker—dustman, blacksmith, or bricklayer—in the land."

The crowd cheered at hearing these words, and a part of the audience followed to have a good look at Morris when Glasier hurried him off to get a cup of tea before addressing a second meeting, at Waterloo Hall, a little later. About eight hundred people came to this. It was a great success: Morris "made"—or confirmed—nearly eight hundred Socialists in an hour, a contrast to the many occasions when he had to be content with half a dozen or a pair. When this was over he went on to the branch rooms of the League, and there he smoked, and, as be-

fitted the Rouget de Lisle of British democracy, sang songs with the committee. Then, back in his room at the Central Station Hotel—for he was only the Glasiers' guest by day—he whisked out of his haversack the *Odyssey*, a lexicon, and Bohn, and plunged into translating, exchanging thoughts of Jail Square for images of ancient glory, and of

“ . . . how the sons of the Achæans from the  
Horse poured forth amain ”

He had been prepared for the question : Was he willing to submit to a general divide of riches ? He had said he was willing under the “ proper economic and moral system,” that he believed possible. Two years before, he had gone most carefully into the question of what was his immediate duty in this respect, and he had come to the conclusion that he ought not there and then to give up his capital, or all his income excepting a skilled foreman's wage of, say, £200 a year. He had wracked his soul to be sure of being honest and fair. Middle-class critics writing to the papers had declared that if he was to be consistent he would strictly share profits with all his employees equally, and Morris turned over in his mind that and other possible courses before he answered, which he duly did with the utmost lucidity.

He could, for instance, have given away all his money but what was absolutely necessary for him and Jane and the children to support life

on, and could have settled down into an ascetic, "such a man as I should respect even now." But these were not "times of peace," and his conscience would not have let him do it. He also decided against profit-sharing when it had been worked out that if he gave up his own profits and interest on capital the gain to his workmen would be no more than four shillings per week per head. The cost of this would be his power to support the Socialist cause, and so to bring nearer, as he hoped, the day when there would be proper conditions of life for every one. "Further," he pointed out, "if I were to die or be otherwise disabled, the business could not get any one to do my work for £200 a year, and would in short at once take back the extra £16 a year from the workmen." There was never a truer word spoken.

Meanwhile the actual arrangements at Morris & Co.'s were these. George Wardle and the four heads of departments were getting a share of profits, and the colour-mixer and the foreman-dyer bonuses. The rest of the staff, whether paid fixed wages or—as in the case of men not yet fully trained—by the hour, were allowed more than the ordinary market price of their labour. Morris also kept two or three men employed who were no use at all, "on the live-and-let-live principle"—which he considered not a bad one as things went, "in spite of the Charity Organisation Society."

He thought there would be no sense in helping

a handful of wage-earners to raise themselves above their class even if there was much more than that extra £16 a year to go round. They would merely become capitalists, if only in a small way, and thus make the poor still poorer. So, since he had to choose between perhaps suffering some pangs of conscience and disarming himself for the fray, he preferred the first alternative. He talked it all over with his workmen. They agreed with him entirely, and seven of them at once made up their minds to join the Democratic Federation. Their sympathy was of good comfort to him.

On the broader problem he spontaneously declared himself, in a letter written in 1884 after a visit paid to Edward Carpenter at his little farm near Chesterfield.

It is the quintessence of Morris's philosophy, and his words here give the gist of his answer to the question: How ought a man to live?

"It seems to me," he said, "that the way to enjoy life is to accept all its necessary details and turn them into pleasures by taking interest in them, whereas modern civilisation huddles them out of the way, has them done in a venal and slovenly manner till they become a drudgery which people can't help trying to avoid."

The way to enjoy life—that, to puritans of all denominations, is hardly the problem. "Pleasures" indeed! Many an other-worldly employer of the Victorian Age, hearing these sentiments, would have felt that Morris con-

demned himself out of his own mouth, for sweat and profit go with salvation, but not "pleasures."

Two hundred years before Morris another Englishman had used "pleasure" for the more wonted and reputable "happiness" in a similar context. "If," said Sir Thomas More, arguing with a reasonableness to which only puritans are superior, "it be a point of humanitie for man to bring health and comferte to men . . . to mitigate and assuage the grief of others . . . to restore them to joye, that is to saye, pleasure; whie maye it not then be sayde, that nature doth provoke everye man to doo the same to himselfe?"

Thus Sir Thomas More laid it down that life was meant to be happy, and Morris coming after taught in what kind of a life happiness lay.

He did not live in an easy, self-indulgent way, so no Buchanan is needed to expose the hollowness of what pleasure he took; and as he was an agnostic he did not have to prove that his belief was compatible with Scripture, or an inspired amendment of current religious opinion. He said to Allingham: "I don't touch on matters theological, which I never could understand, except to say that a God who stood in the way of man making himself comfortable on earth would be no God for me."

His dislike of the Churches, and of parsons (who were, among other things, such irresponsible restorers), did not seem to make him at all bitter against belief in God, or the unsophisticated

religion of simple souls. There is an indication of his mind in *John Ball*, when the hedge-priest and the man out of the future are talking in church. John Ball doubts whether very villainous men have souls, and asks the other what he thinks, and the man out of the future says : " Friend, I never saw a soul, save in a body ; I cannot tell." This is Morris speaking, manifestly with respect for faith like the faith of that priest both in and out of the story.

Again in the last of all Morris's writings, *The Sundering Flood*, that enchanting fairy-tale in which all the magic, and all the spells and powers of Earth are on the hero's side, there is an episode that touches with a gruff good-humour on religion. When the hero, Osberne, is at death's door, his guardian genius, Steelhead—who is so heathen that he may not stay inside a house—carries him to a hermit, a learned physician. Steelhead, very influential in a moral way, knowing many secrets hidden from ordinary people, and himself a great wizard, appears unfortunately to lack medical science, and so has had to have recourse to the hermit. To him he commends Osberne.

Steelhead : ". . . Look to him and do thy best ; for if thou heal him thou shalt thrive, and if thou heal him not thou shalt dwindle."

Hermit : " Fair sir, I need neither promise nor threat, for, God's love and Allhallows, I will heal him if it may be."

He proceeds to overhaul Osberne ; and then :

Hermit : " I deem not his hurts deadly, and

I think to heal him with the help of the Holy Saints."

Steelhead: "Thou hast in thy mouth, my friend, a deal of holiness I know nought of But I thank thee, if thou heal my friend verily I will call thee holy."

He says he will go now, and come in to-morrow morning to see how the patient is getting on.

Hermit: "Go in peace, and God and All-hallows keep thee."

Steelhead: "Well, well, we will not contend about it, but I look to it to keep myself."

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### I

MEANWHILE the prevalence of a mild Morris craze, and the discovery that unscrupulous manufacturers were copying Morris's designs and passing them off as their own, showed that the firm was becoming a national institution.

During the years of propaganda, Morris might, if he had not had a passion for the actual craftwork of his trade, have left the business almost entirely to his managers. As it was, the faithful and—where the business was concerned—unquixotic Wardle had for the time being a comparatively free hand to charge what he thought fair prices for the goods supplied by the firm, with the happy result that when Morris retired from active politics in 1890 there was enough money in the bank for him to afford to start the Kelmscott Press.

He loved his crafts, but had accesses of temper about their application to the amenities of rich people. Once in the middle of a job for his old patron, Sir Lowthian Bell, he began stamping and raging, and when he was asked what the matter was, answered that it was maddening to have to spend one's time pandering to the "swinish" luxury of the rich. When he

visited Edward Carpenter in 1886, the simple life of Millthorpe gave him another and more radical revulsion. He said: "I have spent, I know, a vast deal of time designing furniture and wall-papers, carpets, and curtains, but after all I am inclined to think that sort of thing mostly rubbish."

He was inclined to think so—in his occasional Diogenes moods. He usually loved every detail, down to the smallest, of his pattern-making. It was his normal self that rounded on Thackeray Turner one day, when he said: "Do you think I am such a fool, after having had the grind of doing the design, as to let another man have the fun of putting in the dots?"

In becoming a national institution the firm had acquired what is called news value. Essays on its activities were published in the art magazines. When an important tapestry had been commissioned, newspaper correspondents would take the train out to Merton and interview Morris in his little office. Now and again reporters would even write up the works *à propos* of nothing in particular.

This was all to the good: gratuitous publicity which supplemented the advertisement of which Morris was sternly sparing, though he never minded putting out a manifesto if he had something he really wanted the public to know. In one circular he had made it clear that the firm would not work on jobs it disapproved of, and he was as good as his word: an inverted kind of

advertising! He refused to make stained-glass windows for churches that had been restored. He once objected to providing glass for a window in Westminster Abbey, because the window in question, though good as modern work went, had no business, he said, to be where it was.

Towards the end of the 'eighties Merton was employing about seventy-five hands, and after all this time little George Campfield was still foreman, now quite a venerable figure, with the austere impression of his flowing white hair somewhat softened by the gay embroidery round the collar of his blue smock. Besides the journalists, foreigners came to visit the workshops, and they admired the Wandle, winding in and out "with happy, joyous murmurs," and saw chintzes being washed in tile-roofed sheds overhanging the stream, or being laid out, or "crofted," in the sun among the buttercups. They asked questions and were welcome.

One of Morris's methods that must have surprised inquirers was his easy way, when there happened to be a vacancy, of taking on any boy or girl whom he knew of who happened to be wanting a job. The success of this genial lack of system seemed to Morris to prove that if there could again be a living tradition of craftsmanship it would not be long before the average of skill among the common people was raised to a high level. Certainly, in Morris the nucleus of Merton employees had had an unusually good instructor; but then they in their turn did not find it specially

difficult to train the new hands as they came along.

However, there was no tradition ; there was just Morris, self-trained, and in all places at once, thinking of everything, "an extra ounce of indigo\*to strengthen the dye, an additional five minutes of immersion of threads in the vat, a weft of colour to be swept through the warp in a moment of inspiration, a dappling of bright points to lighten some over-sombre hue in the grounding of a carpet. . . ."

It was by learning to deoxidise indigo that Morris had been enabled to round off his victory over aniline reds and Prussian blues and the other crude synthetic colours of the West. He had first used the new—or rather revived—dyes for embroidery silks ; then, having reintroduced the handloom too, he started dyeing wools for his carpets, and later for his other textiles, and for the printed cottons and velvets. He had meant the chintzes to be wall-hangings, something better than the wall-papers, but his clients with one accord took to making these bright materials into curtains and chair-covers ; and it is almost forgotten that Morris had a different destiny in mind for them.

Merton Abbey was indeed quite a jolly place in which to spend an afternoon asking questions, technical or personal.

"And did you know Rossetti?" the *Pall Mall Gazette* man asked George Campfield six years after Gabriel's death.

"Did I know Rossetti?" The guffawing noise Campfield must have made was not reported. "I did indeed. He was a 'laughing' gentleman, always pleasant, always had a kind word for every one, and many and many times has he come and told me of his private affairs." -

A charming recollection of Gabriel—the sinner, the cynic, the no-gentleman, the chloral friend—"a 'laughing' gentleman." Was not that as good a three-word summary of the man as one could have? Gabriel's personality was the greatest of his gifts, and the best of it was a sense of humour. His glooms were his disease; he was a laughing gentleman. Very good, Campfield.

The visitor at Merton Abbey would certainly have been directed by Campfield or some one else to the workshop where the high-warp loom for tapestry was set up. This was another of Morris's revivals, to many visitors probably the chief attraction of the works, since the tapestries were a sort of pictures, executed on a grand scale in a rich tradition. Morris himself worked out the Merton verdura subjects. When figures were wanted Burne-Jones supplied them, often old friends of the Arthurian cycle. He got their arms correct, after 1889, out of a book given him by Morris: thirteen gold crowns for Arthur himself, and for Sanados des Sept Fontaines blue and a shower of silver tears. Morris or Dearle put in the floral backgrounds for Ted's knights, and Morris was always good for birds, but when a lion, fox, or other quadruped was in demand,



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# BLOODY SUNDAY IN TRAFALGAR SQUARE

Philip Webb provided it. And the visitor could amuse himself looking on at the weaving, admiring how the craftsman wove a design which he could only follow in a mirror, seeing it inside-out therefore.

Descriptions of Morris at work are to be sought rather in the records left by his friends than in the files of newspapers. It was not to an interviewer that he observed that all good designing was felt in the pit of the stomach, nor did he oblige reporters with a performance of the characteristic bumble-beeing noise that he kept up while formalising a peacock or a dove, fritillary, rose, or single columbine. As to the quantity of his output, it was computed by his friend Ellis that in the course of his career he designed thirty-nine patterns for woven materials, using for them a hundred and sixty-four colours in various combinations ; forty-two patterns for printed cottons, with a hundred and fifty-nine colours ; fifty patterns for wall-papers, with two hundred and thirty-seven colours.

There were times when the visitor at Merton might have noticed, among the workmen engaged in dyeing, a breezy and loquacious individual, short and sturdy, and with a twinkle in his eye. Morris took this man on more than once when he needed a job, because he was efficient in spite of his irregular habits. It was Frank Kitz : not by any means indispensable at the Abbey, but in the world of Anarchism a big gun.

## II

Morris was lecturing much also.

Not for the first time Watts-Dunton warned him that he was living at too high tension. He only answered: "Look at Gladstone, look at those wise owls your chancellors and judges. Don't they live all the longer for work? It's rust that kills men, not work."

His lectures have the trade-mark of this great one-man enterprise in which so much practical experience was merged with so prophetic a soul. They would not do badly for a constitution for a Ministry of Arts—provided a clause of toleration was appended in favour of the classical style.

"My friends," he would say to his audiences; and it would not be an affectation.

Glasier was perhaps too completely conquered by him to be a perfect witness to the effects of his oratory, nevertheless here is a case where his commendation hardly goes far enough. "With Ruskin," says Glasier, "the people are always *You*; with Carlyle they are even farther away, they are *They*; but with Morris the people are always *We*." Yes; but surely when he said "My friends" it was not only the "people," the wage-earning workmen in his audience, who would feel themselves united with him in fellowship, but also any well-disposed, and even mildly class-conscious bourgeois or sons of peers who might happen to be there.

He was the friend of *every* man with a hope for justice or a love of art. He was not the enemy of any of the rest, and lived in horror of war and violence.

In his lecturing he would try to create an informal atmosphere, as if he were not lecturing but talking. He immensely wanted to communicate his feelings to other people. He wanted them to rise up and follow him, that is, after the lecture to come forward and offer to join the Federation (or the League), pay their first year's half-guinea subscription to the S.P.A.B. (if they were the sort that had half-guineas), and be missionaries of justice and beauty for the rest of their lives.

Ned Burne-Jones had to shut his eyes very tight to facts to be able to go on supposing there was any chance that Morris might withdraw to his studio and just write "divine books," with no regard for what was going on in the tumultuous world. It was the anxious wish being father to the pious hope. His philosophy taught him that by saving his own soul a man was not only doing something very hard and fine, but also useful to others. Morris's philosophy taught not less emphatically that art and the life of the world are inseparable, and nothing is more constantly reiterated in the lectures than that good art depends on reasonably human working conditions for the people at large.

In this way. Very refined, selective art for the few—the rich man, the great man—is bound

to become false by the fact of its depending on such haughty patronage. If there is meanwhile no popular art being produced almost unselfconsciously in the natural course of daily work, then the luxury art will become more and more false, and lose all spontaneity. It will become a toy for a small class. But art by the Ruskin-Morris definition is something quite different: not an ornament for big houses, but an expression of the pleasure taken in his work by every maker down to the humblest weaver, and potter, and shoemaker.

What Morris had against the Renaissance was that it marked the beginning of a change from the modest, workaday attitude of the Middle Ages, when artists had done the best they could, and hoped to do better, to a kind of spell-bound academicism, which made them see in ancient classical art a perfection "which to their minds was different in kind, and not in degree only, from the ruder suggestive art of their own fathers." So far as art was concerned, the Renaissance was to Morris not a beginning but an end of a rich period. He admired the *tours de force* of the great individual Leonardos and Michelangelos, whose irrepressible originality had enabled them to transcend the limitations they had thought it glorious to impose on themselves, but he took care, at the same time, to rub it in that they had graduated in craftsmen's workshops. He was positive that there could be no real revival in modern times till there were workshops once again,

The Renaissance had poisoned art: it was the Industrial Revolution that had completed the ruin of the workshops. Everything had come to be made cheaply and badly by machinery. Finally, taste had almost disappeared, and "the silk curtains in my Lord's drawing-room are no more a matter of art to him than the powder in his footman's hair; the kitchen in a country farmhouse is most commonly a pleasant and homelike place, the parlour dreary and cheerless." How different it had been in the past! Consider: the greater part of the beautiful objects in our museums "are just the common household goods of those past days," and made by whom? By "'common fellows,' as the phrase goes, in the common course of their daily labour."

Since Morris set such store by art it is not astonishing that he longed for the revolution against commerce and machinery by which alone craft could be restored, and the workshops set to working again. With his prophetic penetration he could also see the whole matter in the light of eternity. One had got to say to the modern materialists: "When all is gained that you (and we) so long for, what shall we do then?" When there is enough of everything for everybody at last, "what shall we turn to then, what *must* we turn to then?"

"To what, save to our work, our daily labour?"

For it seemed to him a dreadful paradox that work should be looked on as "all toil." Even

enlightened employers took it for granted that men only worked, and for ever would only work, in the hope of earning leisure, the implication of this view being that what men did in their leisure was not work. Morris said: "I turned my thought to my friends, mere artists, you know, lazy people by prescriptive right: I found that the one thing they enjoyed was their work, and that their only idea of happy leisure was other work. . . ."

Naturally it could not be the same with people whose work was disagreeable. Well, his bold conclusion was that disagreeable work should be lessened by people contenting themselves with fewer possessions, and refusing to buy ugly things—any things they "did not know to be useful and believed to be beautiful." The only thorough work that was being done by the machines was contributory to nothing but war, and the civil war of competition. "If our wants are few," he said, speaking with the voice of the holy wisdom that men have heard from time to time since history began, and not heeded, "we shall have but little chance of being driven by our wants into injustice."

He could also speak, and constantly did, with the voice of practical common sense. He had by now a good deal to say not only about how a man ought to live, but about what a man and the whole community ought to do next.

Besides his pioneer work in the S.P.A.B., he went about begging people not to litter the

countryside with waste paper. He was one of the vigorous agitators for smoke abatement. There was already an Act of Parliament against unnecessary smoke, for the most part a dead letter. The evil was an old one, witness the rhyme made up decades ago about Leeds :

“ The Aire below is doubly dyed and damned ;  
The air above with lurid smoke is crammed ,  
The one flows streaming foul as Charon’s Styx,  
Its poisonous vapours in the other mix.”

No irreconcilable enemy of invention as such, Morris prayed Science to come forward and teach the industrial towns to consume their own smoke and what to do instead of turning their waste dyes into the rivers. He found Science otherwise engaged—busy, he observed, in the pay of the counting-house and the drill-sergeant.

He was an advocate of town planning and housing schemes. Why, he asked, must builders always pull down trees, instead of sparing as many of them as possible ? He tried to infect his audiences with love for trees and hedges, and quiet landscapes of field and farms, assuring them that beauty spots did not deserve the whole of their consideration. Why should the houses of the rich and poor alike not be beautiful ? He would like his hearers to remember that the lovely Cotswold houses were new once, and no more a blot on the scenery then than now ; and it was the village mason who had designed them.

A forerunner in so many respects of the modern good citizen, Morris must not be confounded

with forerunners of the modern enthusiasts for efficiency, for though he advocated some of the measures they have approved of, his motives were not theirs. His motives were, to make the world beautiful—theirs, to make the world foolproof and more rapidly revolving. He put beauty before convenience. Speaking about wall decoration: it is assumed, he says, “that you know better than to use gas in your rooms, which will indeed soon reduce all your decorations to a pretty general level.” Gas, to him, was not an advance on candlelight if it shed gross yellow flickers on things of beauty.

There is of course an ideal efficiency of life; it is what Morris wore himself out expounding to his countrymen. But the word “efficiency,” as commonly used to inflate emotion, is a sound indicating a mere mutilated, three-dimensional concept. The dimension of time is not thought to be involved. With the sense of eternity there also went out, about a hundred years ago, an ear, so to speak, for the characteristic human *tempo*. Scientific—or mystical—breathing exercises will not be enough to restore a healthy rhythm to the lives of civilised men and women. The true meaning of efficiency will turn out to involve much more consideration than has so far been given for the human capacity to assimilate the wonderful inventions of science. The question is partly one of growth, therefore, to a certain extent, one of time; but it is also a question of what human nature is fundamentally

like. Since we are creatures with limitations, there must necessarily be limits to the material equipment we can usefully employ. Thus, as Morris saw clearly, some of our technical devices were hit upon too soon, while others would be a curse at any date, and had best be forsworn, even if Earth came to be inhabited by angels and saints.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### I

IN 1886 Morris wrote an article which he called *Dawn of a New Epoch*. He agreed at once with imaginary objectors to the title that in a sense a new epoch is always dawning. Still, he said, it would be unreasonable to maintain that when one looked back on history one could not, here and there, "distinguish periods in the lapse of time that are not merely arbitrary. . . ." Change never ceases, but sometimes it is especially purposeful and deliberate. "Now I think," he went on, "that we are living in one of these times of conscious change." So he thought—so he passionately believed. Like St. Paul, he was prepared, tingling in anticipation of a signal. St. Paul's very words might have come spontaneously from his pen. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."

Sixty generations—sixty more, that is, than Paul believed were ever to inherit the earth—have suffered so much from the moral code based so illogically on his mistake, that it is hard to excuse what seems to have been no better than a wretched, barbarous superstition. Let us be

fair. We must at least allow that it need not have been pure credulity that buoyed this stubborn Jew through life and in his last agony. He was credulous, perhaps, because the article of faith matched perfectly his enthusiasm for what he understood by justice. When he repeated to the Corinthians his message that "time was short"—meaning that the Second Coming of the Lord was to be expected at any moment—he may have been feeling that it was high time something radical was done to put the sheep and the goats in their right places once for all. The limit had been reached. The wicked world was ripe for doom. All this swindling and oppression and fornication could positively go no farther. He could well believe that God was about to put a stop to it, for if he had been God that is exactly what he would have done, and it was a splendid privilege to be in a position, now, authoritatively to preach the imminent vindication of the righteous. Obviously, times being what they were, no alternative to Judgment was possible.

And William Morris, many centuries after, was for a while driven by moral anguish into a curiously similar frame of mind. His cup also was full: and for several years he would have found so unendurable the thought that the exploitation of the poor was to go on indefinitely, that he created and clung to a fantasy that revolution was suddenly going to usher in a New Epoch. What he looked forward to was something as sublime as the ride of the Four Horsemen

—only the Day of Wrath was to be a day of prompt deliverance. Against the whole testimony of his reason he believed the day was at hand. Not the quarrelsome habits of his colleagues, nor the muddled reactions of the working men to Socialist propaganda, nor the hostility of the middle class, nor the snubs he personally was always having to put up with—none of these things quenched his faith that one afternoon he would walk out and discover from the cheering and waving of Socialist banners on Hammersmith Broadway that the thing had happened.

It was not the wise Utopian Morris that thought like this, but the poet mad about justice, The conscientious politician who in those days was another party to his make-up could do nothing to disillusion him. The politician tried keeping a diary: "Jonah's view of the whale, my dear, you know." One might have thought it would have undone the spell. He began it soon after finishing *John Ball*, in January 1887, and it was such a record of cross-purposes among the leaders and of apathy among the scanty led, that the persistence of the apocalyptic hope is amazing. The last entry in the diary was made on 27th April—the business of helping the whale to navigate had become too pressing to allow Jonah time for keeping an elaborate log. His hopes, if anything, had grown more intense. They broke out typically in *The Tables Turned, or Nupkins Awakened*, a play he wrote some months after abandoning the diary.

*Nupkins* was performed in Farringdon Road in October for the benefit of *The Commonweal*, and a queer, magnificent production it is: a kind of collaborative effort by a pageant-master with a bluff sense of humour, and the Evangelist John. It is 'slapstick dovetailing into high drama; vigorous, reckless propaganda, and an orgy of wish-fulfilment; and Punch-and-Judy, and Theocritus, and Bernard Shaw.

The Shavian touch is easily explained. A young red-bearded Fabian journalist was present at the first night (of four) and was much impressed. Ten years later he was still convinced that Morris would have written for the stage, and brilliantly, "if there had been any stage that a poet and artist could write for." Of course there could really have been no Shavian touch in *Nupkins*, but there have been touches of *Nupkins* in a good deal of Shaw—to name only two: quick transitions from the sublime to the absurd, and the gay singeing of majestic whiskers.

*Nupkins* is in two scenes, a longer and a shorter. The first is set in a Court of Justice, where the Judge, Nupkins, is unabashedly administering one law for the rich and another for the poor. With many apologies he sentences Mr. La-di-da, guilty of embezzlement, to a month in what we now call the Second Division, whereas poor Mary Pinch, falsely accused of stealing three loaves—one for each of her starving children (the agony is piled on)—gets three months' hard

labour. The proceedings are livened up by disturbances—cries of “fat-guts” and “blooming old idiot,” which Shaw, and others too, must have loved; and when Nupkins can stand it no longer he quick-changes into Dogberry and exclaims: “Officer! arrest everybody present except the officials. I will make an example of everybody! I will commit them all.”

Mr. Hungary, Q.C., does not see how this can be done; he says as much to the Judge, adding: “There’s a Socialist prisoner coming next, you can make him pay for all.”

The breezy John or Jack Freeman, the Socialist, is Morris using an alias. The charges against him include sedition, and obstructing the Queen’s Highway. The play seems on the point of becoming a little too topical, when, just before Jack Freeman calls his witnesses, confused noises and the *Marseillaise* are heard off in the far distance: the drama begins to unfold. The first witness, the Archbishop of Canterbury, declares on oath that Freeman’s alleged obstructive meeting consisted of from three persons to ten—no more: in answer to Freeman he observes: “There was a kind of Sabbath rest about it, scarcely broken by the harangue of yourself, sir”—which was just what was the matter, alas, with many of Morris’s real conventicles. Next Lord Tennyson and Professor Tyndall are called; then “*Marseillaise again without and tumult nearer*,” and before long, of course, just when Nupkins has sentenced Jack

to six years, "great noise: *Marseillaise* sung quite close: hammering on the doors." There bursts in a man described as a "Socialist Ensign," carrying a red flag.

Jack: "What does it all mean, Bill?"

Ensign: "The very beginning of it, Jack. It seems we have not been sanguine enough. The Revolution we were all looking forward to had been going on all along, and now the last act has begun . . . hurrah!" And so the curtain falls on a collapsing Nupkins.

It seems we have not been sanguine enough! The night is far spent, the day is at hand! The Dawn of a New Epoch. . . .

And then full daylight. Scene Two. The Fields near a Country Village. Time—After the Revolution. Enter Citizen (late Justice) Nupkins. He is in terror of his life; he breaks down and weeps. Enter Mary Pinch, prettily dressed, and prettily—we must admit pretty-prettily—soliloquising; apostrophising the fine day, remembering herself as "a little freckle-faced child"—but if not in point of wit, at any rate physically, and because she is happy, not at all a bad advertisement for the new Arcadia. And then she notices the cowering Nupkins. "Why, there's a man ill or in trouble; an oldish man, too. Poor old fellow! Citizen, what's the matter? How can I help you?"

Now, thinks Nupkins, all is over: these people will fall upon me and revenge their horrid, common selves for the justice I meted out to

them in the good old days. Oh dear, he sighs, "that dreadful word 'citizen'!"

Is it a dreadful word, or does a certain sympathy one feels for Nupkins here merely come from the difficulty of imagining English people addressing each other by it without affectation? Comrade, however, because so much more presuming and familiar, and suggestive of bloody crises, is worse. You are *my* comrade, and I am yours; at least we are not one another's citizens. Best of all, really, is Jack or Bill or Clement, but till Mary Pinch has had a chance of finding out which Nupkins is, she had perhaps best call him citizen. There would, of course, be no sense in sir in an equalitarian community.

Not to keep readers too long in suspense as to Nupkins's fate, let it be said at once that after some teasing from a bunch of his old victims, he is informally condemned to earning his living by agricultural labour. "To use your old jargon, citizen," says Jack Freeman, "the sentence of this court is that you do take this instrument of effodiation, commonly called a spade, and that you do effodiate your livelihood therewith"; and his tutor is to be Mary Pinch's husband. Though this was not execution, it was to Nupkins little better than Siberia. "A world without lawyers!" he cries, desolate, "... oh dear! oh dear! To think that I should have to dig potatoes and see everybody happy!"

Thus are the Tables Turned; and now the play is over, and on to the stage comes pretty

May Morris with a guitar and sings "Come Lasses and Lads." Then the curtain. Even so the entertainment is not at an end. A short, sturdy young man in a kimono appears, twirling a Japanese sunshade. He sings "Titwillow" He is Mr. John Burns, already a marked man, cut out to be a hero of the cause. Hurrah! What fun! What an evening! Most memorable the acting of William Morris himself in the part of the Archbishop of Canterbury. When the part had been refused by Walter Crane because he did not "fancy himself" in it, Morris had agreed to oblige. "He made no attempt to make up . . . in the ordinary stage fashion. . . . A pair of clerical bands and black stockings proclaimed the Archbishop; the rest he did by obliterating his humour and intelligence, and presenting his own person to the audience like a lantern with the lamp blown out, with a dull absorption in his own dignity which several minutes of the wildest screaming laughter at him when he entered did nothing to disturb." That is what Bernard Shaw thought of the author-actor's performance.

Within a month of these pleasant distractions Shaw and Morris and Burns were involved together in a far different adventure.

## II

Did Morris, when the grey day of Bloody Sunday dawned, imagine that before night fell

he would have seen the "beginning of it," the beginning of the last act, as Ensign Bill had put it ?.

One may believe that he did not. For while he expected his mystic Revolution to break out at any moment he was pathetically resigned to having no part himself in the immediate glory of the great change. He would hear of it, like Jack Freeman, when it had begun to happen. Meanwhile he must suffer something of the pangs of Moses viewing Canaan from afar. Or even all the pangs : might there after all be no Socialism in his time ?

He was convinced there would be, only not issuing from clashes and demonstration. In March there was a reference in the short-lived diary to a meeting of the Hammersmith Branch of the League, at which, just before proceedings came to a turbulent end, a resolution was passed that Socialist speakers should be bidden "not to draw on quarrels with the police." Morris goes on, disenchantedly, "Though I doubt if they will heed it often ; as some of them are ambitious of figuring as heroes in this free-speech business." The general public had a more comfortable suspicion of those speakers, namely, that they were not really in touch with the working men they claimed to represent.

Freedom of speech, though, did seem supremely valuable to Morris, and also the freedom of assembly (in order to make and listen to speeches) that it implied. The fiasco of

Black Monday had been a lesson as well as a grief to him. He would be content if the multiple organised demonstration of Sunday, 13th November, passed off strictly according to plan, impressing the Government with a sense of the will, the aims, the conscience, the dignity of the democratic movement.

There were united that day, on the side of the marchers, Socialists, both Social Democratic Federationists and League people, Radicals, and unemployed. They planned to converge from the four points of the compass on Trafalgar Square, where the police had categorically forbidden the Radicals to hold a meeting. They set out that glum morning with many emotions of discontent in their breasts.

The Radicals wanted to express their indignation with the Government's Irish policy, and especially with the imprisonment of William O'Brien, M.P. The Socialists shared these feelings; they also took the field for measures of unemployment relief, as demanded by Hyndman in his latest programme of reforms. And the unemployed themselves made up the rank and file of the drab columns: men angry, sad, despairing, without a right to work or to eat, without a stake in the world—and yet with something besides their hunger and misery to rally them to-day. They may have believed that Englishmen, though starving, might legally be denied bread, but they were quite sure—it was a faith ingrained in their national make-up—

that Englishmen could not legally be denied the right of getting up and making a speech. They were free men, not like those poor foreigners with their conscription, their frog-eating, and their knouts.

The South London contingent got no further than Westminster Bridge. Here they were repulsed by soldiers after a tussle in which a few of the marchers got hurt badly enough to have to be taken to hospital. Meanwhile one of the Northern columns began to make contact with the police cordon (six deep) at the Strand entrance to the Square. There followed a sharp struggle. Annie Besant is said to have flung herself at those six-deep police. By her own account she showed less dash and more generalship : she tried to get a cart drawn up lengthways across the road to check the head of the column when it showed signs of retreating. Hyndman, Burns, and Cunninghame Graham did somehow break through the cordon into the Square, only to be overpowered and arrested—Graham sticky with blood from a blow on the head delivered by “one of our admirable police,” as Mr. Gladstone later called them ; and not without justice, though one can see how to the other side this was adding insult to injury. And now two squadrons of Life Guards came up, contributing a touch of colour and a thrill of terror to the scene.

Morris, with Bernard Shaw beside him, had set out with some thousands of marchers from Clerkenwell. When they got to Shaftesbury

Avenue they were attacked by the police with truncheons and their formation was broken up. The authorities were getting nervous. Morris slipped away by himself towards Trafalgar Square. He arrived in time to see a battalion of Foot Guards taking up position. The fight was over and the day lost.

After all he had been through, the aspect of this smooth-handled human mechanism which so effortlessly consolidated the victory of repression gave Morris a feeling of deep vicarious humiliation. The memory remained hideous and rankling, but embittered him perhaps less against any people than against a nameless, cruel stupidity in the order of society. The hands that clasped the rifles, the legs that wheeled like two legs, were the limbs of common men, the brothers of those common men in shabby clothes whose discomfiture they had so easily completed without a thought, probably without an emotion, and without firing even one of the twenty rounds of ball cartridge that had been issued to them. There was not a single shot on Bloody Sunday.

Apart from the direct tragic impression made on him by the one-sided contest, Morris had the mortification of being able to compare this rout of destitute, workless men with events of a few centuries past, when English peasants, feeling themselves aggrieved, had met their masters on far other terms. "But now as soon as those men began to move on us directly in face, Jack Straw put his horn to his lips and blew a loud,

rough blast that was echoed by five or six others along the orchard hedge. Every man had his shaft nocked on the string ; I watched them, and Will Green specially ; he and his bow and its string seemed all of a piece, so easily by seeming did he draw the nock of the arrow to his ear. A moment, as he took his aim, and then—O then did I understand the meaning of the awe with which the ancient poet speaks of the loose of the god Apollo's bow. . . ." The battle scene in *John Ball*, besides being a confession of faith in English freedom, is a vivid masterpiece of narrative, intensely exciting, however little one cares for the thought of those terrible arrows killing through cloth or leather at five hundred yards. We may be sure Hyndman was not flattering when he said he had never thoroughly understood Agincourt until Morris described it to him one night. But on Bloody Sunday there was not a single shot.

A single life was nevertheless taken. A young workman called Linnell died from his injuries a few days after the affray.

Now it is of course most unlikely that such a clash on such a scale would have passed off in any other capital city without a good deal of bloodshed, and the loss of many more lives than one. Yes—the police had been admirable. And so had the Radicals and the middle-class Socialist leaders and the thousands of unemployed. After all, no favours had been received by the agitators, unless broken heads instead of death were so to

be regarded by citizens of a free country. It was not really very ungrateful of them to turn Linnell's funeral into another demonstration. "To say the governing classes of England are not afraid of free speech, therefore let us abstain from speaking freely, is a strange paradox to me. Let us on the contrary press into the breach which valiant men have made for us." That is how Morris had declared himself four years earlier. But now the governing classes were afraid of free speech, and Trafalgar Square continued to be picketed by the police.

Linnell was buried at Bow on 18th December. His coffin was followed through the rain by a large crowd of sympathisers, amongst whom were Morris, Annie Besant, and the Reverend Stewart Headlam. Annie Besant was a brick, in Morris's opinion : it is one of his few recorded comments on other than fictitious members of the female sex. Neither she nor Headlam spoke over the grave, but when Mr. Tims and Mr. Dowling and Mr. Quelch had held forth in the crudest language, dubbing Mr. Gladstone's admirable police "hired murderers in uniform," Morris stepped forward, and to the people whom the drizzle and the rhetoric had not yet discouraged from lingering in this cheerless neighbourhood spoke a few words in another strain. He said : "Our friend who lies here has had a hard life, and met with a hard death ; and if society had been differently constituted, his life might have been a delightful, a beautiful, and a happy one. It is our business

to begin to organise for the purpose of seeing that such things shall not happen ; and to try and make this earth a beautiful and happy place." •

This voice raised in Bow cemetery did not come from the impulsive Topsy, the boisterous and sanguine poet-decorator, the kind, choleric protector of ancient buildings, nor was it the voice of the important member of the Socialist League, who was co-editor of *The Commonweal*. It might almost have belonged, but it did not, to the listener for that Last Trump that was going to be sounded by the trumpeters of Ensign Bill's brigade. It was the voice of William Morris who, besides being all of them, was a soft-hearted man of great faith. Dixon Scott's "First Morris," his Morris-of-the-moated-grange, had by now had a wide experience of life. He knew the pathos of squalid existences, and it made him rate beauty and gentleness and brotherhood the higher. By the light of the lantern over Linnell's grave he could see standing about in the damp evening groups of poor people : it was by his own inner light that he saw how bad and mistaken was the turn of human polity that allowed them to go needy and down-at-heel who were "unhelped, and so harmless and good-tempered." The heaviness he had to bear when, as now, not in his apocalyptic mood, was the feeling that all the time there were people suffering privations for which no justice or mercy on earth would ever make up to them. Mostly

practical good-workers are relieved by the *mens conscia recti* from worrying too much over what is being endured by *others* while *they* are getting the new age ready to dawn at the earliest possible moment. "All's well that ends well," is their cheery watchword; and one need not grudge them peace of mind so long as it is only themselves they sacrifice. Woes irreparable are mourned by a few tender spirits only, and from sorrow mingling with sorrow a heavenly love is born, but even it has no influence to make the prison give up the captive falsely accused, or the grave the innocent done to death; even it cannot mend the broken heart, or be sure of restoring hope to the hopeless and tired and destitute.

### III

In the anxious years that followed, the middle classes fancied less than ever that "a beautiful and happy place" was what Socialism, if it got a chance, would be likely to make the earth. Meanwhile they expected the world to come tumbling about their ears to the tune of Anarchist bombs. They could not help feeling it was mere capricious academicism to try to distinguish the Anarchists from their uneasy comrades in the League, or even from the avowedly constitutional members of the S.D.F. As the Fabians realised, the State was moving towards a greater socialisation because, at the time, it could hardly do anything else; but the Socialist parties were

none the more popular for that. Morris disapproved of the Fabians. He was not ready for a reconciliation with them and with Hyndman till 1892. He refused to compromise over his ideals—and it is worth noting that Bernard Shaw himself said: "We can flummox him in debate, but he is fundamentally right."

Still, Morris now gradually began to resign himself to the prospect of Socialism going through a parliamentary stage. It was not only because this would rule out a sudden and glorious turning of the tables that he disliked the thought. And it was not because parliament seemed to him a bad kind of institution, out of date, promoting talk instead of fostering action, that he regarded it as on the side of the enemy. The last thing he wanted was a Man—a heavy-handed Cromwell—to rise up and make a clean sweep. He wanted not a Man, but Men. For parliament, as he saw it in the light of his principles, meant not too much talk—it meant too little. No doubt at present there was too much of the wrong sort of talk being talked by the wrong sort of people. But parliament had got to be superseded by no Dictator, but by more or less *everybody*, by all men of goodwill meeting with neighbourly informality at periodic motes. "Under Socialism," he said in one of his letters to the Reverend George Bainton, "the relations of men to one another would become personal." There would be many parliaments instead of one, and more talking, and co-operation, and friendly adjust-

ment. It seems a dangerous ideal to people who like giving orders. It is, however, human, and it is very English.

In the League Morris had from the start found himself between two stools, a situation in which only a man of his spiritual masculinity could have avoided collapse before this. About Whitsun, 1888, a serious crisis developed. There appeared to be a chance of the parliamentarians outvoting their opponents. Morris would not have fought against them as he did if they had agreed to seek election to the House of Commons only to behave as rebels should they get there. But this was not what they meditated. On the eve of the Conference Morris was perturbed by the possibility of their arguing his faction round. A sheer racket, he called their behaviour. If they succeeded, he and those on his side whom he knew he could rely on would simply leave the League—"And what then? We have all the speakers that count, we have *The Commonwealth*, and I have the money—more's the pity maybe." This was not exactly pride, nor was the toss he took, before long, provoked by the obstacle of which he had been so apprehensive.

Before setting out for Farringdon Road next day Morris promised Jane he would be a good boy, and behave himself, and not lose his temper. "He is quite naughty sometimes," Jane explained to Glasier. Glasier was in London for the occasion, staying at Kelmscott House.

Glasier and May bore witness afterwards that

he was not naughty at the Conference. The parliamentarians lost their resolution after all ; so now, thought Morris with relief, " the damned business was over for at least another year." He was so pleased, and he had been such a good boy through twelve hours of anxiety and smoke and talk, that it only needed an incautious remark by poor Glasier for him to fly into the wildest typhoon of a passion. All Glasier had said was that Burne-Jones did not seem to be an imitator of nature. Then Morris's eyes " flamed as with actual fire, his shaggy mane rose like a burning crest, his whiskers and moustache bristled out like pine needles." He had beyond doubt an unusually responsive *chevelure*. " Every hair of his head and in his rough shaggy beard," says another witness, " entered as a living part of himself " into his conversations. And now he stormed and raged. Nature, forsooth ! Art, forsooth ! Where the hell was it ? This infernal civilisation . . . the damnable callosity of the rich . . . look at their furniture . . . damn this . . . damn that . . . as many damns as if the Duke of Wellington were speaking. And there in his nightshirt in bed sat the Scots guest, petrified, till Jane knocked at the door, and asked her husband to give the rest of the household a chance of getting to sleep. " I knew," she said next morning, " when I heard him boasting of his good behaviour at the Conference that somebody would have to pay for it ! " So he had not been a good boy after all.

And the result of the parliamentarians being outvoted was only that Morris had a short reprieve in the frying-pan before being pitilessly tipped into the fire. They were outvoted because the Anarchists were growing stronger. With these Morris was soon in conflict. They added to an intransigence equalling that of the parliamentarians a wild temper, and began to adopt towards Morris a hostility that he felt he little deserved.

Now whereas Anarchism, realised, would be the most benign, Arcadian way of life for mankind, the Anarchists of the late 'eighties and early 'nineties were in many cases desperate and unhappy men, some of them much-persecuted, whose indignation with society made them ready to adopt any means to bring about its overthrow. Though beside their ideal world the floating island kingdom of gentle Zeinzemin would have seemed all irksome restraints, a paradise only for slaves, the more impatient among them showed such un-Utopian violence that the adherence to their creed of peaceful, sagacious men like Prince Kropotkin did nothing to give Anarchism a good name. The very courage of their martyrs horrified law-abiding citizens. In the eyes of the world Ravachol, not Kropotkin, was the typical Anarchist—Ravachol, who, as he went to the guillotine in 1892, contributed to the *Anthology of Last Words* an impenitent catch :

“ Si tu veux etre heureux  
Nom de Dieu !  
Pends ton proprietaire.”

Morris was sorry for the sufferings his foreign Anarchist friends had endured. But he was not an Anarchist ; he was a Socialist, and a sociable one at that. To him co-operation was more than an expedient. He liked the idea of it as a permanent basis for a brotherly life for all people, and anyhow he did not see how there could be happiness, or art, or any civilisation without it. Like a true democrat he wanted practical fraternity, and like a sensible man he wanted conventions. "The fact," he said, "that at present many or the majority of laws and customs are bad does not mean that we can do without good laws and customs." He was devastated by the outrages done or attempted by Anarchists about this time all over the world.

The flesh of the middle classes everywhere crept. And their fears were easily directed, in England, against the S.D.F. and—with a little reason, after Whitsun, 1888—against the League. Some of the humanest of men were identified with their scatter-brained comrades, and regarded as capable of anything. When the Honourable Richard Grosvenor, a friend of the family and a Radical, came one day into the untidy study at Kelmscott House, and hesitated, out of diffidence, to clear a chair for himself, Morris cracked a sad little joke. "Oh, you can sit down all right," he said, "there's no dynamite under the papers."

By October 1888 the sense of being looked upon by people of his own class as a villain in league with quite conscienceless enemies of society

had helped to bring low the loyal Charlie Faulkner. He became paralysed. His faculties were dimmed, and thus Morris's "inevitable travelling companion" reached the end of his journey worn and prostrate, unable to recognise his leader, his greying Topsy, or that other faithful friend, the ever kind and patient Philip Webb, with whom he half mechanically played backgammon as he lay on his deathbed. It was nearly thirty years since those great games of throwing apples at the Red House; more than thirty since Dixon's thrilling prophecy that Topsy was a big poet, when the Brotherhood, at Oxford, confident in one another's talents, had mutually predicted an assortment of triumphs. Nobody had imagined clever Charlie Faulkner living and dying, as in a way he did, for justice.

Morris resisted the depression of those days with the help of his greater reserve of nervous energy. He worked on. He wrote pamphlets, prefaces, magazine articles; he started on his romantic prose tales—these, however, were not to do with the business in hand. He lectured on successive days in different parts of the country. In London he regularly gave addresses at street corners, or, while colleagues spoke, went about the crowd offering *The Commonweal* at a penny. If a man looked interested, but seemed unable to afford the penny, he would make him a present of a copy, saying: "Well, my friend, never mind about payment. I'll stand that if you'll promise to read the paper." In such ways he continued battling for his League, with relations between

himself and the Anarchists getting steadily worse. It is not to be surprised at that he had moods of discouragement. He wrote to Burne-Jones: "I am not over inclined for my morning's preaching at Walham Green, but go I must, as also to Victoria Park in the afternoon. I had a sort of dastardly hope that it might rain. Mind you, I don't pretend to say that I don't like it in some way or other. . . ."

When the London County Council came into being in 1889 Morris hardly attached much importance to the event. He said: "You see John Burns has got some of his desires . . . rather him than me in the position—ugh!" Burns had been elected a Liberal-Labour member of the Council. Burns was following the road with his feet on solid earth. Morris now was by no means all in the air, but still not—what he could never become—exclusively pedestrian. There would be no sense in our regretting it—nor that Christ did not seek a civil service position under Pilate.

Burns distinguished himself again in August and September as leader of the great dockers' strike. And now observe how comparatively reasonable Morris—poor Morris one could say—had grown. For here was something very different from mere patching the social fabric; here was a sensational movement—a confident strike for a minimum wage by unskilled working men, with the organised trades coming out on their behalf. There were monster meetings in

Hyde Park and on Tower Hill. The business of the Exchange was held up. In the music halls songs were sung about the "dockers' tanner," and always loudly applauded. And, besides Burns, the strikers had found men to lead them, Tom Mann and Ben Tillet : here was a fact that might have raised Morris's expectations ; and funds were coming in, and discipline was excellent. As the days passed, and resistance stiffened, people could be heard to venture the opinion that the hour of revolution had come.

But Morris was not one of those who thought so. His hopes of a Day, his cherished dreams of the advent of Ensign Bill had at last been dissolved. He wrote of the strike, after it had been on for a fortnight, that "perhaps our folk a little exaggerated the importance of it, as to some of them it seemed that now at last the revolution was beginning." Weary tone, almost pitying touch—as if such an idea could never have entered *his* head ! He believed the strikers would be beaten.

He had, just at this time, a special reason for feeling sore. His Anarchist colleagues had made it impossible for him to go on editing *The Commonweal*. Though he contributed notes for some months longer, and *News from Nowhere* ran on by instalments till the end of 1890, his last Mag. was hereafter a source of anxiety to him, and little else. All things considered, 1899 was a depressing year for him. "Every Sunday morning," Burne-Jones wrote to Norton, "as

of old, Morris to breakfast—and yet not as of old—for we are silent about much now and used to be silent about nothing.” At home things were not bright. Did he own to Jane, who, as ever, embroidered much and spoke little, that he was disillusioned with his “field-days,” as she called his propaganda outings? May, who in her quiet way was a great help to her father, his disciple in art and politics, clever and considerate, much against his will engaged herself to one of his young Socialists. Then there was Charlie Faulkner’s illness—“such a grievous business,” he wrote to Georgie Burne-Jones, “that rightly or wrongly I try not to think of it too much, lest I should give way altogether. . . .”

Now, as always, Georgie understood. She knew the meaning of his Socialism better than Ted, who would certainly not, as Morris once flippantly insinuated, have been converted if he could have had an assurance that the Revolution would spare the National Gallery. To Georgie, Morris had always been able to write describing his aims without challenge or apology. Her heart beat for Morris the prophet as Morris’s for Ted the painter.

Those Sunday breakfasts at the Grange, which were no longer quite as before, were meant to be—so one always reads and hears said—an arrangement for Topsy and Ted to enjoy one another’s company. Neither Topsy nor Georgie laid much stress on their own independent friendship, of which their correspondence spoke

eloquently enough, as likewise did the presents offered by Morris and accepted by the kind little brown-haired woman. Of these the Icelandic diary and the exquisite copy of Omar Khayyám, written out by himself, were the most choice. He had nothing more personal to give.

For reasons which can only be guessed the Burne-Joneses seldom went down to Kelmscott. They had been there in 1886. It was nine years before Georgie went again, not very long before the end. She found the place leafier, and wrote to Ted: "I feel the added years in Janey and Topsy and me, so that it seems like visiting something that is not quite real." Time and change, by then, was happening to them all.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IN January 1890, the *Commonweal*, already Anarchist, getting violent, and soon to become criminal, began publishing by instalments *News from Nowhere, or an Epoch of Rest*. Like some other literature and much journalism this story was partly written in trains—on the Great Western Railway between Lechlade and London.

It ran through thirty-nine numbers. When it had been concluded there were only two more contributions, an article and an open letter, to come to the paper from Morris. His break with the Anarchists was complete. And Frank Kitz, who had superseded Morris as editor in 1889 ("by no means a bad sec.," Morris had been angelic enough to say of him), joined with other comrades in denouncing their dropped pilot through the medium of the paper which they had proceeded to appropriate without please or thank-you. They used *his* paper for applauding robbery and advocating dynamite. It was a change for readers, after *News from Nowhere*.

This "Utopian Romance" is three things: Morris's masterpiece, and a masterpiece, and a sacred book.

Now the world's great moralists have a way of holding out to the man in the street glorious

prospects that do not really correspond, whether he avows it or not, with his own notions of the ideal. The man in the street "knows what he likes," he has his familiar prejudices—and Isaiah and William Morris have visions. Shall the lion lie down with the lamb? The man in the street would rather be able to fit out an expedition to go and shoot him, still a roaring, rampaging beast of prey, king of the jungle, and with the makings of a fine hearth-rug.

What tyrants these Utopian writers are, and who would want to live in any of their Utopias? No one must interrupt and say that as a matter of fact he has sometimes thought it might not be so bad in one or another of them: the question is rhetorical, a prelude to a series of digs at a company of great enthusiastic men. Plato's *Republic*, with its orphans; Campanella's *City of the Sun*, with its death-penalty for the girl who uses lipstick; Well's *Modern Utopia*, where obesity is a bar to high office. . . . It is true, most of the ideal imaginary lands are rather prickly with regulations; but the traveller who merely touches at their ports cannot bring home a very just report of the daily life of their inhabitants. These people, in fact, are on the whole kindly and hospitable, averse from shedding blood, and not greedy for personal gain at the expense of others.

And whatever the Utopian Morris was, he was no tyrant. Four capital limitations he did impose on his English of the future. If we have regard for the accepted meaning of tyrant, and

consider the nature of these restraints, we shall have to agree that tyrant will not do. The things forbidden were War, Ugliness, Competition, and Intolerance. Man was no longer to be a wolf to man.

It was reading Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, in his day the latest of the typical progressive Utopias, that inspired Morris to embark for Nowhere. Bellamy was a humanitarian, a sympathetic person and a lover of justice, shrewd too, and logical. He was a descendant of Eugène Cabet, of the *Voyage en Icarie*, and derived a second strain of French blood from Sebastien Mercier, who had in a dream explored the Paris of A.D. 2400. Like Cabet, Bellamy put his faith in mechanical inventions. Like Mercier he built Jerusalem on the soil of his native land—on the site of Boston, to wit. Morris similarly brought Arcadia to the Thames Valley: it was one of the few points he did have in common with Bellamy.

There is this distinction between him and nearly all the other Utopians, that he did not set exaggerated hopes on Knowledge and Power. He believed in Brotherly Love, and that people would be happy and virtuous and beautiful if they had interesting work to do, and were all something of artists, and could be honest about their personal relations. Knowledge—there is no Utopia in which children have fewer lessons than in Nowhere. Power—there was no statue put up, where Morris's writ ran, to the inventor of dynamite.

The history of the world is a gloomy commentary on the Knowledge and Power ideals which Francis Bacon so effectively brought into fashion. All the nations have their Houses of Salomon, their Institutes and Academies, their Researchers and Propagandists, yet Utopia is still Kennaquhair, an island, perhaps, in the ocean south of Taprobane, marked on no map. Our Knowledge mocks our hearts, and we live in daily growing fear of the Power put into our hands by our dispassionate Elders of the House of Salomon — themselves so often simple and kindly men. But of our prominent, active, clever ones, our leading "live-wires," it still holds good, as Burton had it, that "they will measure ground by Geometry, set down limits, divide and subdivide, but cannot yet prescribe *quantum homini satis*, or keep within compass of reason and discretion. They can square circles, but understand not the state of their own souls, describe right lines and crooked, but know not what is right in this life, *quid in vita rectum sit ignorant*. . . ."

Morris was not, for all that, an enemy of science. He did not really suppose that it would be a good thing if all machinery were to be destroyed, especially not in the actual world. He approved of machinery where its employment "entailed no detriment upon the work, either directly or through the enslavement of the men who did the work." For instance, he was for plain cloth being woven by machinery. "But

mind you," he said, "even then there's a danger. You've got to have somebody to look after the machine, and if he does that all the time he soon becomes less a man than part of the machine."

In the England of his Utopian future, there was to be practically no machinery. This ordinance was, Utopianly, perfectly legitimate. If we are fair, we shall admit that it also stands to reason, and is not incompatible with the precedent evolution of machinery to a very high pitch of efficiency.

Imagine that a few hours' work a day by a fraction of the world's population is now enough for all mankind to have its wants supplied : why, then, the disciples of William Morris—the promoters of the last and greatest Morris Movement—will turn the tables once more—against the machines. This time they will have almost limitless leisure to spend at the hobbies that they enjoy—in making things, and making them useful and beautiful. After a while it will have become unnecessary for the machines to make so many bedsteads, because plenty will have been made by hand, by the Morris people, and made much more beautiful and desirable than the standard ones. And so on, throughout manufactures, till the human touch is everywhere again visible, and only plain cloths and milk bottles and bicycles are left to the machines.

At last a proper balance of labour and leisure will have been attained. The bedsteads will be art, and they will be work ; they will be a hobby

that matters. Morris had seen that the false conception of leisure as good for anything except work had risen through the interposition into human affairs of gold—money—wages. It is the anxieties and oppressions connected with earning a living that have made work seem to so many people necessarily odious. Morris, looking far ahead (not as far as Isaiah, seeing the lion lie down with the lamb), understood that leisure is not to be regarded as happy when it is a removal from the characteristic needs, activities, and rhythms of the world. Leisure of that sort can only be compared with a suburban villa, with a drive flanked by rhododendrons, an ornamental garden, but no bean rows, set down incongruously among fields and orchards, and seeming to feel awkward, and rather superior, among its neighbours, the cottages and barns and the unaffected old manor-house. Leisure as irrelevance, leisure as an opportunity for going incessantly to hear oratorios, did not seem a blessing to Morris. But there are always a few people who really care for a purely contemplative life. There is nothing in Morris's Utopia to prevent them from meditating for as long as they like, and without fear of finding themselves destitute because they have not got a regular job.

One of the great charms of this England of the Epoch of Rest is that its roots are so securely planted in the homelier strata of the historic age. Nowhere is announced in the England of *John Ball*, a dream of a disturbed England, which

reveals, nevertheless, a staunch and liberty-loving people, friends to the stranger within their gates, and knowing good homespun and worsteds from bad. Their simple cottages are furnished with well-wrought tables and cupboards, they love flowers, they believe God made all men to be brothers.

Is it all really so absurdly overdrawn? Was Morris really under the impression that life in the Middle Ages had been so nearly *couleur de rose*?

He had in fact summed up history reasonably enough. For the most part through the centuries the "people" had worked with "the meal-trough before them and the whip behind." He knew that. What he felt he could do was to trace back to the England of John Ball the pedigree of the democratic spirit.

Generously, wisely, he then expected the best of the future to develop out of the best of the past. His sleeper awakening in Utopia needs no new standards by which to judge the English among whom he finds himself—it is indeed amazement enough to find they are up to the old standards, instead of merely to the old averages. There is no new truth, no new beauty, only the everlasting sorts much nearer realisation.

It has been objected to *News from Nowhere* that no mention is made of old ladies. But though Christ did not tell us what those things were that we should render unto Cæsar, the Gospels remain an exhortation to men that they should live in peace with one another; and

though there are no elderly female characters in Morris's tale, and only one elderly gentleman has a part in it (other than the hero), the book is sacred, and its message not obscure.

*News from Nowhere* breathes a wonderful humanity. In this respect no other Utopia compares with it. It is not, of course, a book about *how* to make the world better. It is a picture of the world *made* better. It is a revelation of human personality.

Morris's message is always being confidently rejected by people who have not read him very carefully. He did want science to reduce our physical ills. He did, indeed, realise what science might turn out to be capable of—had it not even occurred to him that sooner or later "books might be abolished in favour of some distilled essence of literature carried about in bottles?"

The intelligent correspondents of technical journals, who write with justifiable enthusiasm of grids, labour-saving, silenter engines, and other marvels, hint at a well equipped society—but well equipped for what? Have they the face to suggest that Morris, the formidable enemy of slums, and overcrowding, and smoke, and dirt, and darkness, did not want invention to be used for improving the lot of the working classes? Yes, they have the face, some of them; presumably they feel that because he loved art as well as hygiene, and even put art before comfort, his merits are annulled.

How ought a man to live?

Not only, said Morris, by being a punctually paying subscriber to the public utility services, and one not parsimonious with the gas, either. The problem of how a man ought to live is not even solved when the man has become air-minded. There must be air aces who are prodigal with the midnight electricity, and who yet are selfish, stupid, and malicious.

Technicians are there to equip us for moving smoothly from one point to the next. Moralists are there to remind us that, with eyes open, or with eyes shut, we circle for ever like moons round our divinity. Being open-eyed has most often been called worship, which means a consciousness and love of things in themselves.

It was not only because of his viking eyes and well-informed talk of nautical matters that made a party of sailors with whom Morris fell in, one day, in Fenchurch Street, take him to be a retired sea-captain, or Ancient Mariner. For that is what he was, this son of Sigurd: an Ancient Mariner, and his message was that we should open our eyes, and see, and worship; always remembering that

“He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.”

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### I

ONE can hardly regret that Morris did not become Poet Laureate after Tennyson's death in 1892, though if he had done he would have been better known to the next generation—owing to historians and writers of articles, as well as journalists, having a very human, easygoing acquiescence in the rightness of reputations sealed with a title. He was not exactly *offered* the Laureateship. He was “sounded by a member of the Cabinet, with Mr. Gladstone's knowledge and approval, to ascertain whether he would accept the office in the event of its being offered to him.” The answer was No.

When all is said, was not the possibility, the likelihood one gathers, of the offer being made, a fine example of England's *fin-de-siècle* liberality? In 1893 the governing classes were still in a panic about Anarchism, still very hostile to Socialism, but paradoxically, for they themselves looked increasingly for State control both in commerce and the administration of public services. Since the triumph of the dockers in 1889 there had been many strikes. Morris, sitting in a club with a friend, was addressed by an acquaintance

of his host's, who had not caught his name, with : " Well, what do you think of these strikes ? I can tell you : it isn't so much the workmen, it's those damned Socialist leaders. They are infernal thieves and rascals, the whole lot of them." Morris, grown patient, quietly answered no more than " Indeed." This was enough to make the vehement clubman change the subject ; but what he had said was characteristic middle-class opinion.

Yet Morris was " sounded by a member of the Cabinet. . . ."

It is true he was known to have left the Socialist League in disgust before it had become so depraved that the police had had to put it down altogether. On the other hand, his Hammersmith Socialist group was notorious, and none the more commendable to respectability because the quarrels between it and the Anarchists " were far more bitter than those between either and Constituted Society." The quarrels were not all wordy. Mr. Hueffer recalls that in the early 'nineties he " saw the Anarchists break up a Morris-Socialist meeting at Kelmscott House, the Morris-Socialists break up an Anarchist assembly in Hyde Park, and a tremendous set-to between Morris-Socialists and Fabians in a North Kent suburb." Yet in spite of his obstinate clinging to Socialism, and these deplorable fist-cuffs—a man of sixty brawling in public—he was considered for the Laureateship.

Mr. Mackail says : " He was frankly pleased

that he had been thought of. . . . In private conversation Morris always held that the proper function of a Poet Laureate was that of a ceremonial writer of official verse, and that in this particular case the Marquis of Lorne was the person pointed out for the office." What a solemn, what an unimpeachably correct sentiment! It might have been a courtier speaking. Almost it seems a pity he did not give a favourable answer to the Cabinet Minister who sounded him. With such tact united to a talent for rhyming, what pæans might have been engendered! In private conversation, however, Morris also said he would just like his friends to picture him "sitting down in crimson plush breeches and white silk stockings to write birthday odes in honour of all the blooming little Guelphlings and Battenbergs that happen to come along!"

Needless to say, it would have been absurdly incongruous for Morris to have become Poet Laureate; but the Liberal Government gets a good mark for sending along that unnamed "member of the Cabinet"—unless one can believe that there was a deep-laid scheme afoot to weaken Socialism by luring the most eminent adherent of the cause into the upper ether of convention.

Swinburne was unacceptable to Queen Victoria. The Queen had a long memory; it was his violent attacks on her old friend Napoleon III. that disqualified him now. The end of it was that, after three years, Alfred

Austin "floated in . . . on the success of a prose volume about his garden in Kent."

If Morris *had* been chosen it would have been on the strength of, at any rate, no recent poetry. He had published no important poem since *Sigurd*, nearly twenty years ago. He would not have floated in on the *Chants for Socialists* or with the *Pilgrims of Hope*. After his period of most active politics he had come back to literature as a writer of romantic prose tales.

But as Professor Saintsbury said, he was "the typical poet of the latter part of the century." What he had done was mightily done; and, besides, "he was the first to publish, if not to write, of all his school, and no member of it has the combined notes of that school so well as he." These were genuine literary reasons for thinking Morris the proper successor to Tennyson. Topsy had turned out a big poet.

It may also have been felt, though dimly, in high quarters, that a second reason for paying him a national honour was to be found in the diversity of his accomplishments. It was recognised that he was more than a kind of transcendently brilliant conjurer. He was a man of many parts, of the race of universal geniuses—a race, evidently, doomed to go down in the struggle for existence; for all his technical expertness not chiefly a specialist; poet and champion of costermongers, printer and connoisseur of Persian carpets, designer of chintzes, architect of Utopia; and above everything a man

THE PROLOGUE OF THE TALE OF THE MANNE OF LAWE.



**HAIRY CONDICION OF POVERTE!**  
With chur, with cold, with hunger so confoundid!  
To asken help thee shameth in thy hert;  
If thou noon aske, so soore artow ywoundid,  
That verray nede unwrappeth al thy woounde  
hid!  
Maugree thy hedd, thou most for indigence  
Or afele or begge, or borwe thy deapnce!

Thow blamest Crist and seist ful bitterly,  
He mysdreperteth riches temporal  
Thy neighebor thou wytest synfully  
And seist thou hast to lye, and he hath al  
parfay geseow, somtyme he rekent shal  
Whan that his tayl shal brennen in the gilede  
for he noht helpeth needfule in his neede

Herke what is the sentence of the wise  
Bet is to dyen than have indigence  
Thyselve neighebor wol the despise  
If thou be poure farwel thy reverence!  
Yet of the wise man take this sentence  
Alle the dayes of poure men been wikke,  
Be war therfore er thou come to that prikke!

If thou be poure thy brother hateth thee,  
And alle thy frendes fleen from thee alle!  
O nche marchauntis ful of wele been yet,  
O noble o prudent folk as in this cas!  
Yours bagges been nat fillid with ambes as,  
But with svs cynk, that nenneth for yours  
chaunce,  
At Cristemasse myrie may ye daunce!

Ye asken lond and see for poure wyngynges,  
As wise folk ye knowen al thestat  
Of reques ye been fadres of tudynges

with the innocent and generous heart of youth, and the mind and the presence of a sage, a most reverend signior.

He had grown very dignified. He was never so beautiful as in his last years, looking older than he was, with his beard and curling locks of silver, now, and his eyes so small, so blue, so bright with courage and sadness and benevolence. In despite of the world's trend, almost universally (and thoughtlessly) acquiesced in, towards greater collective power at the expense of personality, he had stood for the individual. A very egregious individual he had himself become : peculiar, but undeniably grand.

How peculiar, indeed, those prose romances show. He seems to have been the scion of some mysterious earth-folk pertinacious to resist all conditioning by the topical and the transient. Whisked at birth into a human, middle-class cradle, he never lost his hereditary aloofness : that unegoistic self-absorption that made his friends grieve at times from a doubt how much he depended on them for his happiness. And though, really, lack of their fellowship would have been hell for him, he had, beyond all commonplace endowment, a talent for communion with the elements and the natural world, with the wind—which he loved—and the river and the rain, and with trees, and with the ghosts of the past, and with those souls of things which are immortal because they are the continuous threads along which life and death are

strung like alternating beads of day and night ; and that is how his friends came to wonder whether they were indispensable to him.

The romances were peculiar—peculiar themes, peculiar language. The grand elderly shop-keeper-poet had settled down to writing, in determined archaic English, the strangest fairy tales, skeins of myth and magic woven by his fancy into patterns of unearthly happiness. Their significance is clear : they represent his giving way to the temptation he had so long resisted—the temptation that troubles few people enough—of pursuing perfection. He had sturdily idealised ordinariness all his life. Now his duty was done ; he had become the champion of the day's common work, and of the common man and woman who are obliged to do it. Now he could with an easy conscience indulge that passion for the highest, the infinite and absolute that had all the time been the mainspring of his actions, and, marvellously, the explanation of his restraints. He opened his arms to the exquisite.

It was rather late in the day for him to capture it. The romances are Morris, therefore they are powerful and sweet and human and abundantly alive. Neither they nor the Kelmscott books are precisely exquisite. The romances (speaking of all except *John Ball* and *News from Nowhere*) are not so much exquisite as drolly and charmingly conventional, the wish-fulfilment of good children everywhere, and also of the forceful, idealistic kind of nineteenth-century Englishman—the

kind who liked to know at once when he began a tale on whose side he was going to be. Morris's formula was to take his romance, add a cupful of democratic sentiment, sprinkle with Gothic, and after stirring well allow to cool on ice from Longjökull. The result was not exquisite, but how immensely satisfying! And though conventional, uncommon and unvulgar.

A plain account of any of the narratives might sound no more than foolish nonsense. In *The Wood beyond the World* there is a young man with an unsympathetic wife. He seeks adventure, and meets a Maid with whom he (and the reader) at once falls in love. She loves him too. They escape from the house of a wicked Lady, after killing a hideous Dwarf. On their way to safety the Maid thinks it a wise precaution to claim to be the new god of the Bears, who are a tribe of giants through whose territories they have to pass. An elder of the Bears says to them: "My children, you shall now come with me unto the Doom-ring of our folk, the Bears of the Southern Dales." He warns them to be truthful. The Maid answers: "Thou art old and wise, O great man of the Bears, yet nought I need to learn of thee. Now lead us on our way to the Stead of the Errands." Of course with the help of a little convenient magical lore the Maid successfully carries out her benevolent deception. She and the young man become Queen and King, and live happily ever after.

The course of True Love running smooth,

after much tribulation of spells, the crystal happiness of the Heart's Desire wrested by faith and courage at last from falsity and spite—these are the themes of the romances; and they hint with a moving eloquence at the supreme ecstasy of devotion that comes, Stendhal has told us, from the first touch of the beloved's hand. In these tales the ecstasy seems to survive the consummation of love between lovers who are never, from their first meeting, ashamed of longing for the moment when their bodies can be joined.

## II

The last cause of the Kelmscott Press was a lecture given in 1888 by a friend of the family, Emery Walker. He had never lectured before, and was nervous; the "brown velveteen artist," they called him.

They had known him since 1884, when Morris had met him at a Socialist conference. The lecture, delivered at the New Gallery under the auspices of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, was about printing types, and was illustrated by magic-lantern slides which showed the type faces much enlarged. Morris left the gallery with Walker. "Let's make a new fount of type," he said. This time he was not going to be shaken from his old determination to produce perfect books. Perfection again. . . .

Thirty years earlier he had gone to Whittinghame, of the Chiswick Press, the best at that

time, to get his *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* printed. Ten years later he planned a fine edition of *The Earthly Paradise*, and Burne-Jones had got a number of blocks cut for it, but till 1888 it was of decoration, not typography, that Morris had chiefly thought when contemplating perfect books. His own study and practice of handwriting now made it all the easier for him to understand the fine points of typography.

He invited Walker to go into partnership with him. "But mind," he added, "I shall want everything my own way!" He threw himself into studying incunabula. A year and a month after Walker's lecture type-designing was begun.

Everything was done in due order with meticulous exactness, and Morris mastered all the relevant techniques, even the ones there would be no need for him to practise. First, Walker sent him enlarged photographs of chosen fifteenth-century types. He designed on the same large scale, and then had the results reduced. He went about with match-boxes containing these "smokes" in his pocket, and often, as he talked, would draw them out and "thoughtfully eye the small scraps of paper inside." He learnt punch-cutting, and made researches into the art of paper-making. There was the problem of ink: he could get no satisfactory ink at home, he got it from Hanover. Later, when he wanted vellum for his *Golden Legend*, and there was no more to be got from Rome, owing to large orders having

been placed by the Vatican, he thought of appealing to the Pope to release some, "on the ground that the *Golden Legend* was a book in which he ought to be interested." The situation was saved by Mr. Band of Brentford, and Turneys of Stourbridge.

While his health held out the Press gave him enormous pleasure. It kept him eager and busy ; it was great fun—by so much the loveliest work in the world that he wished he had been a printer from his mother's womb. Perhaps he was most perfectly happy as he sat designing book decorations with a saucer of Chinese white and a saucer of Indian ink before him, first making a faint pencil sketch, then stroking the body colour in. In six years he invented six hundred and forty-four title-pages, borders, initials, and marginal ornaments !

Thus his æsthetic revolution passed into its last phase.

On 12th January 1891, when everything was ready, a cottage had been taken at 16 Upper Mall, and an Albion hand-press installed. Three months later *The Story of the Glittering Plain* was published, the first of sixty-two Kelmscott books. The small staff worked with enthusiasm. "You know, Mr. Morris," one of his men said to him, "one of these days you'll wake up and find yourself famous."

The types used by the Press were, the Golden, an English or 14-point roman ; the Troy, a Great Primer or 18-point black-letter ; and

thirdly, the Troy reduced to a Pica, 12-point, and known as the Chaucer. In this the *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* was printed on vellum—the most famous book issued by the Press. There were eighty-seven illustrations by Burne-Jones ; the date was 1896.

Burne-Jones had done something in 1894 of which Morris disapproved so strongly that the matter was not once mentioned by either in the other's presence. He had accepted a baronetcy. "I should like to tell you privately," he wrote to de Morgan, "that I accepted this haughty eminence to gratify Mr. Morris." Morris was left to find out the news in the papers.

If he was shocked, the public was amazed ; and indeed a little shocked too. For to the plain Englishman of the day Ted was not a solemn, painstaking painter, in a manner remotely Florentine, of etherialised figures from the Celtic Valhalla, the shades of their former selves, drained of blood and purged of vice—but a radical, an extremist, an exotic person tarred with the same brush as the late Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Ted, in short, seemed a Bolshevik to the plain Englishman ; Ted, who would not read *Tess* or *Anna Karenina* because he was gentle and hated to be harrowed ; who would not hurt a fly ; who was wistful and delicate—always having to lie down and rest ; who was shrewd and sensible ; an affectionate father and grandfather ; who took refuge from the world in old illuminated books that it had taken a lifetime to make.

With women beginning to ride bicycles in bloomers it only needed the appearance of Ted's name in the Honours List for the more conservative public to recognise that the foundations of national solidarity were being shaken.

If the plain Englishman had developed his suspicions rationally he might have arrived at an interesting conclusion. It might have occurred to him that Ted would never have risen to his baronetcy if Gabriel (more than twelve years in the grave) had not during his puissant reign imposed Ted on the circle of his own admirers, who had in turn spread this reputation till tribute had been exacted from the First Lady in the Land herself.

Morris would have admired Ted's work without pressure from Gabriel, as from Oxford days he had had for Ted a special kind of protective friendship which made him usually sympathise too entirely with the subjective impulse to be able to regard its outward expression impartially. He simply thought people stupid if they did not like Ted's pictures. Naturally, then, he got great satisfaction from Ted's collaboration over the Chaucer and other Kelmscott editions.

They were none the better for it. For that quality of stressfulness which makes the Kelmscott pages seem over-exacting to the retina was only emphasised further by the wan, withdrawn figures contributed by Burne-Jones. They are in suspense, or they stray brooding and distracted at a tangent from the high road instead

of marching with the type. Or again—look at Adam pretending to delve in the frontispiece of *John Ball*!—a lymphatic Olympian, miscast. Nevertheless the Kelmscott Press, of all details of the Morris Movement, has so far been richest in consequences. The twentieth-century improvement in book production owes a great deal to it.

What in fact was this Movement, in its æsthetic aspect ?

Nothing less than an attempt to turn the Gothic Revival into a Gothic Renaissance. And no one knew better than Morris what a lone hand he was playing. He knew, he was always preaching, that without a return to the guild system, or something like it, without workshops and a ramification of craftsmanship among the people, there could be no Renaissance of the kind he wanted. His Socialism, as we have seen, did not rise from "a purely æsthetic impulse," but it began by being, and it remained, a largely æsthetic creed, because he did not believe that without popular art the new age could be less vulgar and depressing than the old.

The history of the rise and decline of the Gothic Revival had been instructive. It had shown, for instance, the chief particular in which Gothic is at a disadvantage as compared with Classical art. This has a well-regulated language : its grammar, the orders and rules for observing proportion : its vocabulary, the permutations of form created by all the distinguished architects

and artists and craftsmen who have worked in the style. Not exactly popular, it is at any rate fairly generally practicable. With Gothic this is not so. Morris was right in this : no popular art, no Gothic. But his emphasis was on the art, not on the style. The Morris Movement was not an effort to create, or recreate, a style, so much as to make art live, and leaven life with beauty. Morris did not want wall-papers for every home—he wanted the day to be hastened when “ man shall help man, and the saints in heaven shall be glad, because men no more fear each other.”

More immediately, the Movement helped to raise English standards of art and decoration, and made contributions to the national store of good things. Morris himself was the custodian of a tradition, a man of taste who with tongue and quill blasted nonsense wherever he met it, and who was not afraid of the Academy—into which, much to his disgust, Ned Burne-Jones allowed himself to be enticed for a while.

And in estimating the importance of Morris's life-work one must take into account the great impression he made on his friends, on people who only knew him a little, and on the younger men who came to sit at his feet in Hammersmith, to some of whom he seemed as heroic and perfect as any human being need be. To Squire Blunt he was the greatest man of the day ; Henry James recognised him as the quintessential Englishman, a Type, a special complex of virtues and qualities ; Lord Justice Coleridge thought

he would have been the greatest of all cross-examiners. The younger men, risen to be famous poets, economists, politicians, directors of art, have disseminated his influence from their respective altitudes ; and one of the most eminent of them has said : " If some angel offered me the choice, I would choose to live his life . . . rather than my own or any other man's."

### III

Though Morris did not live long enough to ride in a motor car or an aeroplane, or to go to a cinema, his world was getting more wonderful every day. " Little enough did we dream," says Lady Burne-Jones, " when we first came to live in an obscure part of Fulham, that we should ever see a troupe of tall, white-cloaked Arabs flit soft-footed down North End in the twilight . . . or that Red Indians and Zulus would be our near neighbours—yet so it was." She was the demure and gracious Georgie still. Sir Edward, for his part, liked the bears that modern enterprise had brought almost to his doorstep. He was tired—but then, he had always been delicate ; the sad thing was to " see *his* enormous vitality diminishing"—*his*, Topsy's. On Sundays, now, Morris would sit at breakfast with his elbows on the table and his head in his hands.

He put a bold face on the matter ; he said to Ned : " The best way of lengthening out the rest of our days, old chap, is to finish off our old

things." He set about taking his own advice. He tried to go on clipping the yew dragon into shape at Kelmscott—alas! It was too much for him. He could not walk far without getting blown; he had almost given up fishing. Even writing fatigued him, so he would dictate *The Sundering Flood*, his last book, to Sidney Cockerell, who had lived with him for some years as his secretary, and had already been dealing with most of his correspondence.

By the end of 1895 his body failed him miserably, but he persevered with his intellectual, artistic, and Socialist activities—inaugurated the Oxford Socialist Union specially to oblige a chimney-sweep friend, supervised his Press, spoke at the funeral of Stepniak outside Waterloo Station in the rain. His last public speech was in support of a resolution for checking the abuses of advertising, and he made it in the lecture-room of the Society of Arts on the 31st January 1896.

On Sunday, 23rd February, Georgie Burne-Jones noted in her diary: "No Morris to breakfast."

His trouble, apart from a general exhaustion of his organs, was diabetic, complicated towards the end by lung weakness which made him cough a good deal. He had also begun to sleep badly. His friends realised there was nothing for it now but to prepare for the worst. Many loyal hearts were dismayed.

He himself said to Hyndman, who came to visit him during a bad spell: "Of course if this

is to be a temporary illness, and I am to get the better of it, and be able to take part in active life again, I shouldn't so much mind being laid up for a few months. But if this is the end of all things I shouldn't like it a bit."

Charlie Faulkner had drifted away in 1892, followed by Madox Brown the next year. Madox Brown and Morris had become reconciled in 1884, it is said through the gracious offices of Georgie, and Madox Brown had sent Morris a box full of gorgeous bandana handkerchiefs to seal their friendship anew. In 1890 he joined the Kelm-scott Socialists, and would sit through lectures in the stable-room, in a comradely way matching his own white shock of hair with the chairman's white beard and tossing curls. How they had tossed, that day when an Anarchist had sprinkled pepper on the stove, and he had rushed heaving and sneezing down the aisle!

During illnesses the completing of the *Chaucer* became almost as much an anxiety as a pleasure. What soothed him most was looking at the lovely books he had bought recently, two French manuscripts of the thirteenth century in particular, and a twelfth-century English bestiary.

Even in 1895 there had been a time when he was not allowed to receive visitors. Glasier, who happened just then to be staying at Hammer-smith, quite close, went and sat for an hour under the elm tree in front of the house (for he was still a conscientious atheist) and began, in spite of

himself, to pray for the invalid's recovery, or at least that he might not be in pain.

No Morris to breakfast at the Grange on 23rd February 1896; in May, Scawen Blunt calling at Kelmscott House found "my poor old Morris looking very ill and aged, toddling feebly. . . ." A fortnight later Blunt got Morris away for a change of air to Newbuildings Place, where for the last time the poet saw spring flowers growing wild in the woods and the trees and fields yellow in the sunshine. But now he did not feel he wanted the sunshine. He wanted it to rain. "I am a man of the North," he said.

Two days after his return to London the first copies of the *Chaucer* were delivered. Being no better in health, Morris was in June sent to Fôlkestone, and in August on a sea trip to Norway, as it was hoped the bracing air and the historical associations might between them revive the weary man of the North. All of no avail. He came back to Kelmscott House, never to leave it again. On 1st September he wrote a letter with his own hand for the last time, a note to Georgie, which ended: "Come soon, I want a sight of your dear face."

And now there was a coming and going of old friends at Kelmscott House, Georgie and Ned, Webb and Ellis, and of younger friends too, Cockerell and Walker, all devoting themselves quietly to their Morris, who could not, they knew, hold out much longer. In those days the powers of his soul, his mighty sympathy, his

tender imagination, found little support in the poor body broken by gout and pain. He burst into tears when "something was said about the hard life of the poor." And again, the joy of hearing Mr. Dolmetsch playing a pavan and a galliard by Byrd was too much ; he could bear to hear no more.

Among the visitors who were not intimates who came to offer kindness to the dying man was Oscar Wilde. There was no one whose visits Morris enjoyed more. The impudent and gracious genius of Gabriel's spiritual heir entertained him perfectly. Morris had always spoken well of Wilde. Now he found the precious, intelligent young man ideal company. Let this fact be a final disillusionment to those who had thought preaching at street corners and carrying Socialist banners had turned Morris into a rude fellow, a despiser of highbrows.

Gravely, too, Jane Morris did her part—somebody did notice that and took the trouble to leave it on record. She knew he belonged to the others as much as to her ; she knew no doubt of it had crossed the minds of one of them. This beautiful, strange, and silent woman—what had he to do with her ? She was the mother of his beloved children. He was a man of whom all men are brothers.

So in his sixty-third year he came to die, facing with calm that death which he had always felt made life so sweet.

He did not die in pain, or with a struggle.

"On 3rd October Morris died," wrote Lady Burne-Jones, ". . . as gently, as quietly as a babe who is satisfied drops from its mother's breast."

#### IV

On the 5th *The Times* made haste in a leading article to guard against any undue enlargement of the dead man's reputation by ill-advised admirers. In the obituary notice on another page, too, there was a firm avoidance of hyperbole. If Morris's opinions, the writer observed, "led him, as they have led other generous men before him, towards Socialism, the world can afford to judge him indulgently, as not apprehending much danger from his rhetoric. . . . No human power . . . would give the mass of our workers a love or knowledge of art. Our national nature, and the inevitable laws of economy, will not yield to persuasion, or promises, or dreams."

The same day there was a meeting of cab-drivers in Trafalgar Square. At the instance of John Burns the crowd of between five and six thousand stood for a minute bare-headed and in silence as a mark of respect for the departed.

The Walthamstow Branch of the Navvies' and General Labourers' Union, untrue to their national nature, ignoring the inevitable laws of economy, wrote expressing their faith in "the seed that so noble a man sowed in his great and useful life."

A great gale of wind had started to blow. On the 6th, the day of the funeral, it was at its

height ; but it came from the south-west, not as the piety of Cunningham Grahame would have it, from the north-west. In the rain that accompanied the storm Morris was taken to be buried at Kelmscott. He was carried in a farm cart to his grave—"The only funeral I have even seen," Lethaby said, "that did not make me ashamed to have to be buried."

The Vicar of Little Faringdon read the service in the churchyard, while the leaves tumbled from the dripping trees and strewed themselves in the pools of water and on the slushy paths ; and the Michaelmas daisies bowed their heads in the wind—it had stopped raining—and a few tears were shed by some in the company that stood in muddy boots about the grave. There were the family, and friends, comrades from the old League, workmen belonging to the Co., and country people from round about. Then, when it was all over, the rain came down again ; and soon, the living folk having gone their ways, William Morris lay at rest in the earth, with no echo in his ears of Ned's and Georgie's retreating footsteps, nor of the voices of his girls, nor of the rain splashing, nor of the wind howling over Oxfordshire.

Philip Webb designed a tomb for his dear friend. "It will be a roof for the old man," he said.

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